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# MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

*WORKS BY MISS EDITH SICHEL*

THE LATER YEARS OF CATHERINE DE MEDICI

CATHERINE DE MEDICI

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE FRENCH RENAISSANCE

HOUSEHOLD OF THE LAFAYETTES

GATHERED LEAVES
From the prose of MARY E. COLERIDGE

CONSTABLE & COMPANY LTD

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE.
*From the Musée Condé at Chantilly.*

# MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

BY

EDITH SICHEL

ILLUSTRATED

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LONDON
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TO

## AUGUSTA FRESHFIELD

*Dear Friend, dear Lover of Books—*

*Montaigne said: 'The intercourse of books is safest and most our own. . . . It helpeth us at all points; it consoleth our age and solitude . . . and blunteth the stabs of pain. For books receive us ever with the same countenance; . . . nor can I say how reposefully I dwell in the thought that they are by my side to give me pleasure when my moment for them comes—how gratefully I acknowledge the succour they lend my life, for, in truth, they are the best provision I have found upon this human voyage.'*

*To whom better than to you should I dedicate this my inadequate study of the man who wrote thus?*

*He also said: 'We do not live, we only exist, if we hold ourselves bound by necessity to follow one course alone. The finest spirits are those that possess the largest choice, the greatest suppleness.'*

*This is another, and a warmer, reason for my dedication to you, who possess so large a choice—the charitable listener, who know so well how to live the life of understanding and sympathy.*

*EDITH SICHEL.*

# PREFACE

In publishing this little study of Montaigne, I should like to express my gratitude to M. Fortunat Strowski for the invaluable help I have had from him in choosing and getting my illustrations, and for his kind gift of the photograph of a page of the manuscript of the *Essays* from which my last illustration is taken.

Also to M. Steinheil for so generously giving me the prints from the illustrations of his own collection of portraits of Montaigne, etc., from which all my illustrations, excepting the frontispiece and the print of the page of the *Essays*, are reproduced.

I wish also to offer my warmest thanks to Mr. Thomas Seccombe for all the assistance he has given me in my Bibliography, which is, indeed, his rather than mine. I had only made a bare list of authorities; the scholarly comments are entirely due to his knowledge and his kindness.

E. S.

Hambledon, *April* 1911.

# MONTAIGNE THE MAN

# MONTAIGNE THE MAN

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE was born in 1533. His mother was from Toulouse—a Mademoiselle de Lopez, a Protestant lady of Jewish blood, for her forefathers were Spanish Jews from Villanova, near Toledo.[1] His father, Sieur Pierre d'Ayquem (de Montaigne), was a Gascon gentleman, and a very remarkable man. Montaigne used to say that there was also an English strain in the family, and that during the English occupation of Guienne the Ayquems had intermarried with the conquerors. However that may be, the Sieur Pierre's immediate ancestors were of the merchant class. His grandfather, Raymon d'Ayquem, was a seller of dried fish and a wine-exporter at Bordeaux; Raymon's son, Grimon, kept on the business and married well, so that his son, Pierre, started auspiciously, and had a gentleman's education. He was a man of parts, a man of taste, who, when he was seventeen, got a name for the Latin verses that he published. He mastered

[1] Some authorities trace the family to Portugal, not to Spain.

Spanish and German; he dabbled in Renaissance speculations; he also went to the Italian wars, married his wife on the way home, and settled down to wine-selling.

In after days a love of building grew upon him, and he spent a great part of his time in improving his estate of Montaigne. Here it was that his boy was educated. From earliest days the child lived in an atmosphere of religious toleration. He himself, we gather from his pages, was brought up as a Catholic, like his father; but his brother, Thomas de Beauregard, and his sister (later Madame de Lestonnac) both followed the faith of their mother. That Protestants and Catholics of one family could live together under the same roof in peace and unity is an astonishing consideration for the student of that age of frequent persecution; but history has naturally to be the record of signal cases, since the rest pass unchronicled, and there were probably, especially in the provinces, many houses like that of the Ayquems. In their case, there was no fervent conviction to embitter them. Michel's father had inherited his creed; his mother's race most likely imbued her with the need of religion before dogma, and with an instinct for philosophic tolerance. It seems

as if she could not have much affected her son's life, for, strange to say, he makes no mention of her—he who wrote so much about his father, and loved him with such enduring affection. We need go no further than the *Essays* for a full-length portrait of Pierre d'Ayquem.

'For his demeanour, it was of a gentle gravity, humble and very modest. And he took marvellous thought for the decency and comeliness of his person and his clothes, whether he was on foot or on horseback. In his speech he kept such scrupulous good faith as to be excessive; his conscience and his religion were generally, in truth, nearer to superstition than to the other extreme. As a man he was little of figure, full of energy, of upright and well-proportioned stature. His face was pleasant, rather brown. And he was exquisitely skilful in every noble exercise. . . . I have seen him, when he was sixty, making mock of *our* agility—now throwing himself, just as he was, in his furred robe, upon the back of a horse, now going round the table on his thumb. And he hardly ever went up to his room without bounding over two or three steps at a time.[1]

[1] *Essais*, iii. 8: 'De l'Art de conférer.'

'In all the arrangements of my domestic affairs I love to use his rules and his example, and I shall try and pledge those who follow me to use them likewise. If I could do better for him, I would. I glory in the thought that his will still acts in me and thus goes on in the world. God grant that my hands may not fail in fashioning some image of his life — some reflection of so good a father.'[1]

Pierre d'Ayquem, the dilettante, was a true man of the age. He had his own scheme of education—a fantastic scheme, yet based upon common sense, and not without effect upon the ideas of Michel. This was probably because it succeeded and left agreeable recollections. His father, in his own way, was a democrat. He chose poor people to be the baby's sponsors, and he was sent to live with a family of peasants in a neighbouring village, so that from the first he might be trained up to simplicity and hardihood. Before his infancy was really over he returned to Montaigne, and his education began in good earnest upon his father's delightful system. It was a system which, foreshadowing Kindergarten methods, was founded upon the avoid-

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

ance of tears. All nervous shocks were to be eschewed. The child was to be awakened by music, that his return to consciousness might be happiness. The rod was hung up, it was seldom if ever to be used, and the chief traits that his father sought in those who had him in their charge were, he tells us, 'an easy temper and amenity.' The first, the only language that he was to speak and hear in his early years was Latin. For this purpose his parents, the chosen tutor who held him in his arms, all the servants of the Montaigne household, and even the villagers, learned Latin. More than a hundred years later stray words of that tongue still lingered on in the hamlet of Montaigne. All his baby prattle was in Latin, and he knew no French until he was six years old—it seemed to him like a difficult dialect. The purity of his speech, indeed, remained intact until school learning corrupted it; and soon after he went to school, his masters confessed that they felt rather timid of addressing him in Latin, because, while his words flowed naturally, they still had to hesitate in finding theirs. Greek, too, he began to learn through play, till class routine broke, too soon, into his studies. It was a pity. The home teaching

must have been good, for his sister understood enough Greek to take in a conversation in that tongue which, in later times, she overheard between her husband and an official; they had reasons for not wishing to be understood, for she found his counsel so bad that she peremptorily turned him out of her house. But it was a Latin poet, not a Greek one, who revealed to Montaigne the enchantment of books. At eight years old, or thereabouts, he happened upon Ovid.

'The first relish that I conceived for any book came of the pleasure that I had from the fables in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. For when I was some seven or eight years old, I slipped away from all other distractions that I might read it; the more so that it was written in my mother-tongue, and that it was the easiest book I knew, and the best suited in its matter to my tender years. As for Lancelot of the Lake, and the Amadises and the Huons of Bordeaux, I had not even heard their names.'[1]

We know little of him at this time, excepting his fame as an actor of twelve years old in the plays given at his Grammar School, the Collège de Guienne. But he constantly

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'

tells us that he was not brilliant—on the contrary, inert and apathetic.

'Albeit my health was sure and whole, and my nature gentle and tractable, I was withal so heavy, limp, and drowsy that none could pluck me out of my idleness, not even for the sake of play. What I saw I saw well, and beneath this ponderous disposition I nourished bold imaginations, and opinions beyond my years. My mind was slow, and moved only when it was impelled, my understanding was behind-hand, my invention slack. I had no vices but laziness and languor. The danger was not that I should do wrong, but that I should do nothing. And thus in truth hath it happened. The complaints that ring in my ears are of that description: idle, cold in the offices of friendship and relationship, and over-fastidious in public service. The most insulting folk do not say, "Why hath he taken this, why hath he not paid that?" but, "Why doth he not send a receipt?" and "Why doth he not give?"'[1]

Nevertheless he took in a good deal. He gained a knowledge of Terence, Plautus, Virgil; he worked with private tutors at home—with the Scottish poet and historian

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'

George Buchanan, with the learned authors, Nicholas Grouchy, Guillaume Guérente, and Marc Antoine Muret. As early as thirteen he left school, and for the next ten years we know nothing of him. We can, however, be pretty certain that he studied at Toulouse, the great centre for those who were learning law, for we find that he knew the chief students and professors of the period. He must have heard Cujas, the great jurist, give his first law-lecture — must have had Étienne Pasquier, the poet, for fellow-student, since he it was who chronicled that lecture as one of the events of his life. His days of pupilage ended, Montaigne went to Bordeaux, which alternated with Montaigne as his home; and in this city it was that, in 1548, he witnessed the terrible revolt against the tax of the Gabelle,[1] the murder of the governor, the dire punishment of the town, from which all its civic rights were taken. These rights played a part in the Montaigne records; for later, when Pierre Ayquem, after filling various official functions, was made mayor, he travelled to Paris to negotiate for some remission of the penalty, and characteristic-

[1] The revolt originated at Saintonge, and was instigated by its inhabitants.

ally took with him several '*pipes*' of good wine to make his task the easier. About this time he bought a magistracy, with the idea, most likely, that it would revert to his son. In due season Montaigne became a magistrate of the Court of Périgueux, which was subsequently merged in the Parlement of Bordeaux, and at this administrative assembly he and his fellow-councillors duly registered its decrees. The religious persecutions of 1562, following on the Edict of January, went directly against Montaigne's views, yet he voluntarily came forward to take the oath of orthodoxy; whether as a protest against lawlessness, or, as is more probable, from motives of worldly prudence, who shall say? It is all of a piece with the man who would 'carry a candle for St. Michael in one hand, and a candle for his Dragon in the other.'[1]

However that may be, we may be sure that Montaigne was always a magistrate who worked rather by experience of life than by the letter of the law. Experience was what he sought—and found. To him that hath shall be given, and Montaigne's eyes were always open, his curiosity was insatiable.

[1] *Essais*, iii. 1: 'De l'Utile et de l'Honnête.'

Shortly afterwards he went to Rouen, and there he came into the midst of the sensation that was caused by the discovery of a plot against the life of François, the great Duc de Guise. What is more, he witnessed the Duke's splendid pardon of the criminal. A few months later, Guise lay murdered by another assassin's hand. To Montaigne, conspiracies were little more than a class of human phenomena to be set down in his encyclopædic note-book. He took a much warmer interest in three Brazilian aborigines whom he discovered at Rouen, men of dignity, 'although they wore no breeches,' who were trying to find 'the wisdom of Europe,' and had the luck to find Montaigne.

But these were minor incidents. They counted for nothing beside the great event of his life, which had meanwhile changed his outlook. Three years before this time, in 1557, he met Étienne de la Boétie.

Montaigne was twenty-four. He had lived —he had read—yet we cannot speak of him as complete before he made this friendship. The trend of his mind was no doubt set, his scheme of life formulated; but the finer note, the warmer touch, was wanting; and the sense of a nature above his own, the faculty

for admiration, the intense feeling of solitude after La Boétie's death, the apprehension of mystery which it brought him—all his best hours, the richer parts of his nature, would have been absent.

What manner of man, indeed, was the Montaigne whom we see before us in 1557?

As far as his looks are concerned, he has painted his own picture. 'My height,' he says, 'is rather below the average. This defect hath not only the drawback of ugliness, but, in addition, that of inconvenience. . . . A beautiful figure, in truth, is the only beauty allowed to men. . . . For the rest, my figure is strong and well-set, my face not fat but full, my complexion—between the jovial and the melancholy—showeth moderately sanguine and of tempered heat. For my health, it is steady and gay.'[1]

The last few lines, describing his constitution, describe as much of his character as depended upon it, and that was a good deal—till La Boétie appeared, almost the whole. By that time Montaigne was what he remained: the Hedonist without low tastes, the Epicurean without high instincts, the fastidi-

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'

ous critic of all excess, the lover of ease and spontaneity, the upholder of human dignity, the votary of security, the apostle of his own inborn cheerfulness, the armed foe of gloom and avoidable sorrow—and he taught that most sorrow was avoidable if men looked at things as they were.

Up to this Montaigne stepped La Boétie, two years older than he, his complement in all things, his opposite in many—the Arthur Hallam of the Renaissance, calm yet fervent, walking like Montaigne upon a level path, but a path across the heights. To Montaigne, outward beauty, as he tells us, was all-important. 'It holds,' he wrote, 'the highest rank in human intercourse—it reduces and possesses our judgment, with great authority and wondrous power to impress.'[1] La Boétie was ugly.[2] Montaigne was prose—La Boétie was a poet. Montaigne had no taste for ties, and when he took a wife, it was purely for conventional reasons; La Boétie had made a happy marriage, and enjoyed the bonds that he had formed. Both men desired to be of public service—Montaigne only so long as it involved no risk to himself; La Boétie at any

[1] *Essais*, iii. 12 : 'De la Physionomie.'
[2] *Ibid.*

cost that was demanded. Both were disgusted with politics, but again for different reasons: Montaigne with the disgust of the cynic, who says 'leave ill alone' and retires into the comfort of seclusion; La Boétie with the disgust of disillusionment resulting from effort that has failed. And both were opposed to innovation—Montaigne because he disliked its discomfort and distrusted reform; La Boétie because, like a prodigal son, he had tasted of revolt and found it barren. For, unlike Montaigne, La Boétie had begun life as a rebel, though the pen was his sole weapon. His pamphlet of *Contre-un*, which made a great sensation, was directed against monarchic tyranny. It might have been composed by a Girondin,[1] and, in spite of the author's professed Catholicism, was penned in so Protestant a spirit that Calvin embodied it in a treatise of his own. It was written when La Boétie was little more than twenty—although Montaigne asserts that he wrote it at sixteen, and cautiously saw fit to apologise for it on the score of his friend's youth. The error was perhaps prompted by his wishes, for the pamphlet was the only fact in La Boétie's life of which Montaigne disapproved. And

[1] *Montaigne*: Dowden.

yet it was this work which had first brought his friend's name before him. He admired it long before he knew him.

'There was,' he says, 'I know not what predestined and inexplicable force which effected this union. We sought one another before we had set eyes on one another, and because of the reports that each had heard of each. I think that by some ordinance of heaven we embraced one another by our names. And at our first encounter, which came about by accident, in a crowd at a great city festival, we found ourselves so taken one with the other, so familiar, so mutually bound, that thenceforward nothing could be nearer than I to him and he to me. . . . For that we had so little time before us, having begun so late, and both being men of set habit—he older by several years than I was—our friendship had no time to lose, nor could it regulate itself upon the pattern of soft and conventional friendships, the which demand all the precautions of a long preliminary intercourse. This our friendship had no idea but of itself, and can only be compared to itself. It is not made up of one consideration, or two, or three, or a thousand. It is I know not what quintessence of all ties, this mingled feeling,

the which having taken my whole will by storm, impelled him also to plunge—to lose himself in me. "Lose," I say, and I speak truly, for we . . . had no mine and thine.[1] . . . What we customarily call friends and friendship, are but acquaintances, are but intimacies formed now by chance, now for convenience.[2] . . . But this companionship that we cherished as long as God willed, we keeping the same perfect and entire . . . findeth no parallel. The building up thereof demandeth so many happy chances that it is much if fortune can achieve it once in three centuries.[3] . . . And if I am pressed to say why I loved him, I feel I can but express myself by answering—"because he was he, because I was I."'[4]

There never has been such a votary of friendship as Montaigne; none made such big claims upon it, or had them so adequately fulfilled. 'As for comparing thereunto the love for women, this,' he said, 'cannot be attempted. That fire, well I know it, is more restless, more scorching, more arid. But it is forked fire and changeful—the fire of fever . . . and holdeth us but by one corner.

[1] *Essais*, i. 28: 'De l'Amitié.'
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*

. . . As soon as it entereth upon terms of friendship . . . it languisheth and fainteth. Contrariwise, friendship . . . increaseth only when it is enjoyed, for that it is of the spirit, and that by use the soul is sharpened.'[1]

This kind of conversion to friendship fixed Montaigne's attitude towards baser passions, as far as he himself was concerned. He put them in their place; he had small value for them, but he did not give them up. All that he demanded of himself by the light of this new feeling was to know how to appraise. It was outlook that mattered, not action.

'These two sorts of passion,' he says, 'entered into me in full cognisance the one of the other, but never in comparison. For the first kept on its course, superbly on haughty wing, watching the other disdainfully as it gave its stabs far below.'[2] For Montaigne this friendship represented his Decalogue, his code of morals. 'The one and only friendship, it annuls all other obligations'; it absolves a man from the oath of secrecy, since his friend 'is no other, is myself.' It was, indeed, more than morality—it was religion, the only religion Montaigne had. He lost himself in Étienne de la Boétie. It is

[1] *Essais*, i. 28: 'De l'Amitié.' [2] *Ibid.*

not surprising that he should have chosen him. La Boétie's mind was one of great distinction, singularly harmonious, and his life, strange to say, matched his thought. He was even of mood, yet as ardent as if he were not even. He had studied under the heretical Du Bourg at Orleans, and, after that, his life had few events till his marriage with Madame de Carles, a widow with two children. His wife adored him ; he repaid her feeling, and perhaps the name, *Ma Semblance*, which he gave her, is the surest symbol of their happiness. He grew, too, in public estimation, was sent on more than one mission of importance to the State, and was appointed as a magistrate at Bordeaux. Montaigne, naturally, thought him underrated—'Knowing as I do,' he said, 'that Étienne de la Boétie, one of the men best suited to the needs of France, was left to grope among the cinders of his hearth to the great loss of our common weal. As for him, . . . he was so richly furnished with the goods and treasures that defy fortune, that never did a happier or more contented man tread the earth, . . . but then that is no reason why a noble captain should remain in the ranks.'[1]

La Boétie's honours, it is true, were mainly

[1] *Lettres de Montaigne*: A Monsieur de l'Hôpital.

local, but he had no distaste for being a prophet in his own country, and his last action before his mortal illness was to prepare for the defence of Bordeaux against an expected attack of the Huguenots. He had, besides, many compensations. His social life was a full one. He seems to have had a gift for friendship. At Orleans he formed a close tie with Danou, who later figured as a Reformer. The poet Baïf was another intimate, and so, probably, was Dorat, for one of La Boétie's poems is written upon the clock of Charlotte Laval, who was Dorat's first wife. He attracted the best men of his day, and he had the honour to defend Ronsard from the attacks of a certain councillor who puritanically condemned him for putting earthly love before the love of God. 'There are many more ways than one of praising God,' said La Boétie, . . . 'Let Ronsard celebrate Him in his own divine verse; the councillor, for his part, may praise God hardly less by his silence.' But all these lesser interests paled before his devotion to Montaigne—as warm, as sudden, as Montaigne's feeling for him. Intellectually speaking, one could, if one would, account in some sort for the affinity. Montaigne admired his friend's power of equilibrium and the well-

adjusted balance of his qualities almost more than any of his characteristics. But there was love at first sight on either side, although La Boétie, perhaps, influenced Montaigne more than Montaigne influenced him.

'Having loved,' he says, 'above all else on earth, the *feu* Monsieur de la Boétie, the greatest man, to my mind, of our age, I should think I had failed sorely in my duty if, knowingly, I allowed so rich a name as his to perish. . . .'[1]

'While he lived he did me the honour—and I count it among my greatest blessings—to set up betwixt us a bond of friendship so close and tied so fast that there has been no hidden spring in his soul that I have not been able to know and contemplate, unless, indeed, now and then I proved shortsighted. And without exaggeration he is, take him all in all, so nearly a miracle that . . . in order not to be disbelieved, I am forced when I talk about him to draw in and to understate my knowledge of him.'[2] 'By the grace of God, I have passed my life softly and smoothly, and but for the loss of such a friend, free from heavy sorrow, in full tranquillity of spirit.

[1] *Lettres de Montaigne*: A Monsieur de Mesmes.
[2] *Lettres de Montaigne*: A Monsieur de Lansac.

And I have accepted as my wage the natural comforts that are born with us, without seeking for others. And yet, in truth, if I compare all the rest of this my life . . . to the four years[1] given me in the which to enjoy this being's sweet company . . . it is but smoke, but a dark and tedious night. From the day I lost him . . . I can only drag on wearily, and even the pleasures which come to me, instead of consoling, redouble my grief for his loss. We went halves in all things. It seemeth to me that I rob him of his share. . . . So used was I to be second everywhere, that now I feel I am no more than half a man.'[2]

Montaigne transmits his sorrow. La Boétie's early death still fills us with regret — for his friend, for his own unfulfilled promise. His poetry was not what Montaigne thought it; it is no more than verse of a high average. It is his life that has the power to move us. And his death was of a piece with his life. Montaigne's words, from a letter to his own father, make the tragedy seem as of yesterday.

'As I came back from the law-courts, on Monday the 9th August 1563, I sent to ask him to come and dine with me. He returned me his thanks, but said that he felt rather

[1] In reality six years. [2] *Essais*, i. 28: 'De l'Amitié.'

unwell, and that I should be giving him a pleasure if I would go round and spend an hour with him before he set out for Médor.[1] I went directly after dinner. He was lying down ready dressed—but, already, there was I know not what alteration in his face.'[2]

He told his friend that the day before, too thinly clad 'in silk,' he had played at some game with M. d'Escars and had caught a chill. Montaigne begged him to defer his departure. But as the pestilence had infected neighbouring houses, he advised him to move out of the town. So La Boétie rode to Germignan, two leagues from Bordeaux, in company with his wife and uncle. Next day Madame (called Mademoiselle, according to the then prevailing fashion) sent for Montaigne early in the morning. Serious symptoms had set in; she had summoned a doctor and an apothecary. When Montaigne came, La Boétie 'seemed overjoyed' to see him, and when he said goodbye, promising to return next day, 'he begged with more affection and insistence than I had ever seen him use, that I would be with him as much as I could. I was deeply touched; nevertheless I was departing, when Made-

[1] Probably Médoc.

[2] *Lettres de Montaigne*: A Monseigneur de Montaigne.

moiselle de la Boétie, who had I know not what forebodings, came to me, with tears in her eyes and implored me not to stir that night. So she stopped me, and he was glad.'

Is it the simplicity of Montaigne's speech, the lingering love with which he follows every detail of those days, that makes us feel as if we knew that last sad watch, with its faint flickerings of hope, its dull despondencies, its momentary relief in ministration to the wants of the sufferer? Montaigne came and went. At the end of the week La Boétie told him that 'his complaint was said to be rather infectious, that anyhow it was gloomy and unpleasant.' 'He knew my temperament so well,' he said, 'that he begged me only to come on short visits, but as often as I could. I did not leave him again.' Whoever has measured the depths of Montaigne's caution will measure his friendship by that sentence, and will not find it wanting. Death had not yet been mentioned between them. They had spoken of little, indeed, save the illness, for 'from the first, he showed himself disgusted with public affairs.' But the next day, a Sunday, he fainted, and 'when he came to himself he told me that he had seemed to be in universal confusion and to see nothing but

a thick dark cloud and fog, in the which all things appeared to be pell-mell, and yet felt he no whit displeased throughout this accident. "Death hath nothing worse than that, my brother"—so I said. "It hath nothing so bad," was the answer he gave me.' That same day he grew worse, and Montaigne begged him to tell him any wishes he might have concerning his affairs. It would, he urged, ill befit a true friend, who had always known him to be of good judgment, to allow him to leave business troubles behind him. La Boétie complied, and when the task was accomplished he asked for his wife and uncle that he might tell them what was in his will. 'I shall console them and make them of better cheer about my health than I myself feel,' he pleaded, when Montaigne demurred at his request. Montaigne told him the bad symptoms were nothing. 'In truth they are nothing,' he rejoined, 'even should what you fear happen.' 'That would be pure happiness for you,' said his friend; 'the pain would be for me, who lose the company of a great and wise and faithful friend, such as I know I can never find again.' 'That may well be, brother,' the dying man replied . . . 'but, however these things stand, I am ready to depart when God wills.

. . . And as for you, my friend, I know you possess such wisdom that, whatever your personal claims, you will submit willingly and patiently to all that it pleases His Divine Majesty to order of me. And I entreat you to take care that the sorrow for my loss does not push that good man and that good woman (his uncle and his wife) beyond the bounds of reason.'

Until that time he had hidden his real state from them, putting on the gayest of countenances. Even now when he summoned them, he said that he had no fear of death, but that, since human affairs were unstable, he wished to settle his in good time. His uncle had been to him a father—he made him his heir. He begged his wife, his *Semblance*, to take what he could give, although it was far below her worth. And to Montaigne, 'chosen from among so many, . . . for that a friendship such as theirs was hardly known even in antiquity,' he bequeathed his entire library. Then speaking to all three, 'he praised God that in his extreme need he was accompanied by those that he loved best in the world; he thought it a noble sight, he told them, to see a circle so firmly bound together in friendship.' Presently he called for a priest; 'he had

lived,' he said, 'a Christian and a Catholic, and so he would end.' When he had begun to speak, he had seemed a dying man; but as he talked his colour returned, his pulse grew stronger. Montaigne, his heart wrung with grief, had not been able to answer him. Later he apologised.

'I blushed for shame,' he said to him, 'that my courage failed me . . . and I hardly believed that God could give a man such courage over mortal accidents (as you have shown) . . . but I praised Him that I had found it in one who loved me so greatly and who was so dearly loved by me. . . . Then, taking my hand, "My brother," quoth he, "I assure you that many things in my life have been quite as hard and troublesome to do as this. And, when all is said, I have long been prepared for it—I have long known my lesson by heart. Have I not, at my age, lived long enough? I am nearly thirty-three. . . . As for myself, I am certain that I am going to God and the dwelling-place of the blessed." Then, because I showed even in my countenance the trouble that his words awoke in me: "What, brother!" said he, "do you want to make me feel fear? If I felt it, whose business would it be to rid me thereof but yours?"'

Towards evening he made his will; summoned, in turn, his favourite niece and his young step-daughter, and, after giving them good counsel for their lives, he took his leave of them. 'I wish you, I implore you, to remember me,' he said to his niece, 'for the sake of the friendship I have borne you and not because of . . . your mourning for my death; as far as in me lies, I forbid that to all my friends. . . . And, dear girl, I assure you that if God at this hour let me choose whether I might return to life, or finish the voyage I have begun, I should find the choice very hard. Farewell, my niece and my friend.' He went on speaking, although the room was full of the sound of weeping. But at last he asked the company to depart, and only desired to see Montaigne's brother, M. de Beauregard, a follower of the Protestant faith. 'Would you like me to say something that I have it on my mind to tell you?' he began, after thanking him for coming. Beauregard begged that he would. There was no one, said La Boétie, in whose single-minded zeal for religion he believed as strongly as in that of Beauregard. He knew that the abuses of the Church, sorely needing correction, had prompted his course. 'For the moment,' he

went on, 'I have no wish to move you from your path; in truth I would ask no man to do anything whatever against his conscience. But I want to warn you . . . to flee from extremes; be not so grim or so violent; form no band, no body, apart; unite all together. . . . Take what I say in good part . . . for to say it have I reserved myself to this hour, that, perchance, considering my condition, you might give more weight to my words.'

The next day began his last agony. Even his courage yielded for a moment. He called Montaigne 'piteously.' 'My brother,' he said, 'have you no pity for all the torments that I suffer?' But even then, when Montaigne quoted Pindar, he was able to give a counter-quotation.

On Tuesday he received Extreme Unction, professed his faith and his humility, and, when the priest had gone, begged Montaigne and his uncle to pray for him—'the best office,' he added, 'that one Christian can do for another.' His uncle placed a coverlet upon him. 'It belongs to a noble heart to desire to owe more to one to whom he already owes much,' he said, citing Cicero's Epistles. He often reminds us of Sir Thomas More. Shortly afterwards he said to one near him—

My good friend, I was here on earth on purpose to pay a debt, but I have found a kind creditor who has remitted it'; and later, as he woke from sleep with a start—'Good, good, let it come when it will; I wait for it gaily, standing upright.'

While Montaigne was at supper that evening, he was suddenly sent for. 'I am,' said La Boétie, 'no longer a man, I am only of the human species'; and, indeed, adds Montaigne, 'he was no more than the image and shadow of a man.' But he was upheld—the best moment of his life was the last. 'Brother, friend,' he cried, 'please God that I may behold the reality of the imaginations that I have just had!' After a long silence, 'for his tongue began to refuse to do its work,' 'What are they, brother?' asked Montaigne. 'Great, great,' he replied. 'There has been no time in my life,' said Montaigne, 'when I have not had the honour to share in every imagination that passed through you; do you not still wish me to enjoy them?' 'I am one with you in this,' answered he, 'but, my brother, I cannot tell them—they are wonderful, infinite, inexpressible.' 'And we got no farther,' added Montaigne—'he could say no more.' Death came nearer; he heard the sobs of his wife. A little while before, he had

still kept a smiling face for her, had called her, said he had a story to tell her, and then stopped, unable to speak. Now again he tried to encourage her. '*Ma Semblance*,' said he, '"why torment yourself before the time? will you not have pity on me? Take courage, for in truth the half of my distress is for the grief I see you suffer. . . . As for the ills we feel in ourselves, it is not, strictly speaking, we ourselves who feel them, but certain senses that God has put in us; but what we feel for others, we feel through our understanding. . . . But I am going!" (This he said because faintness had seized him.) Then, fearing he had frightened his wife, he caught himself up. "I am going to sleep," he said, "good-night, my wife; go from me." This was the last leave he took of her.'

When she went, he begged Montaigne to stay near him. 'The thrusts of death grew sharper and more urgent; his voice became louder.' He entreated Montaigne again and again to give him 'some place to be in.' Montaigne thought he was delirious. 'Since you breathe and speak, and have a body, you have a place,' he said.

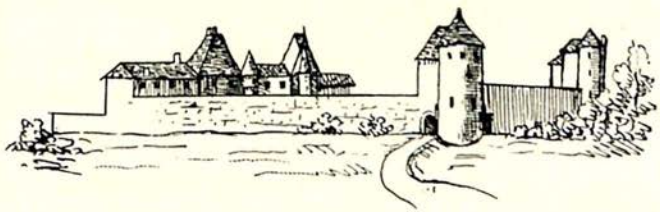
'True, true, it is so,' he exclaimed, 'but it is not the place I desire; besides, when all is said, I no longer have a being.' 'God will

soon give you a better place,' said Montaigne. 'Would I were there!' he answered—'these three days I have longed to be gone.' 'After that he often called me,' adds Montaigne, 'only to make sure that I was near him. And an hour afterwards, or thereabouts, saying my name once or twice, and heaving a great sigh, he gave up the ghost.'[1]

So died Étienne de la Boétie, before he was thirty-four, and with him died, perhaps, the best part of Montaigne. It seems right to dwell long upon this episode, even at the sacrifice of due proportion, because of the immense difference it made in Montaigne's life. It cut it into two halves. It was not only his friend's death that made the mark; it was the manner of his dying. The impression left by his deathbed, most of all by those unexpressed visions, helped Montaigne to keep something alive that might else have shrunk, or even withered. But his heart contracted. After he had lost him, love had little to do with his life. He knew, indeed, only two real affections—that for his father, which had always been there; that for the friend he had chosen. And it was the friend, and the friend alone, in whom he was able to forget himself.

[1] *Lettres de Montaigne*: A Monseigneur, Monseigneur de Montaigne for the description of La Boétie's death.

Signature of Etienne de la Boétie.



Sketch of the Château de Montaigne, taken about 1789 by M. Lacour.

Signature of Michel de Montaigne.

Seal with the arms of Montaigne.

## II

THE finest side of the next two years of Montaigne's life was his loyalty to Madame de la Boétie—his faithful efforts to console her. But he found the task impossible: 'he could not,' he said, 'lay his axe to the root.' She remained inconsolable. These years are best left unrecorded. Maddened by grief, Montaigne deliberately sought distraction through his senses; but, like many intellectual people, his vices were the result of curiosity rather than temperament, and his curiosity came to an end. He thought himself very reasonable. Even in his vices he 'did not,' he said, 'venture far from home.'[1] And after the two years he married Mademoiselle Françoise de Chassaigne, a lady of Bordeaux. He makes no secret of his reasons for marrying. He believed in the institution of the family, and he wished to be made comfortable. He did not care whether he loved his wife or not. He did not care for children, but he cared for his name and his estate. His heart had still

[1] *Essais*, iii. 2: 'Du Repentir.'

no room for any feeling but regret; his wife was bound to be, in some measure, the victim of his sorrow for La Boétie.

'Will any one ever compute,' he asked, 'the value of a friend compared with these civil unions? . . . As I know by too sure an experience, there is no consolation for the loss of our friends so soothing as the knowledge that we forgot to tell them nothing we wished to tell—that we held with them perfect converse and entire. Oh, my friend! Am I the better for having loved such intercourse? or the worse? Surely I am much the better. My grief for him is my comfort and my honour. Is it not the sweet and pious office of my life for evermore to celebrate his obsequies? Is there an enjoyment in the world which is worth my privation?'[1]

All the same, in spite of this indifference to his wife, he was faithful to her. It was part of his code of manly honesty, and, on the score of morality, Madame de Montaigne had nothing to complain of. On other scores, needful to her heart, who knows? But Montaigne shall speak for himself.

'I should deliberately have fled from a marriage with Wisdom herself—that is, if she

[1] *Essais*, iii. 8: 'De l'Affection des pères aux enfants.'

would have had me. But talk as you will, custom and the common habit of life are too strong for us. For instance, the greater part of my actions are not directed by my choice. At all events, I was led hereunto [to marriage] for reasons outside myself, and came to it certainly worse prepared and more hostile than I am now, when I have tried it. For all that men think me so licentious, I have, in truth, more severely observed the marriage-laws than I had either promised or hoped. Directly one hath submitted to an obligation, one must keep one's neck under the yoke of common duty, or, at least, one must try to do so. For if one doth not always fulfil one's duty, at least one must always love it; and one must recognise the treachery of marrying without espousing one another. . . . Marriage hath for its share, usefulness, justice, honour, and constancy—a flat pleasure but a universal one. Love is founded upon delight alone, and giveth it, truly, of a kind more poignant, more caressive, more vital.[1]

'A man doth not marry for himself, whatever people say; he marrieth, quite as much, if not more, for his posterity and his family. The uses and interests of marriage concern our

[1] *Essais*, iii. 5: 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'

race, they reach far beyond ourselves. Nevertheless, I like the fashion of arranging marriages by a third hand rather than by one's own—by the judgment of others, not by oneself. How far is all this from the conventional love affair!' . . . 'A happy marriage, if there be such, rejecteth the company and conditions of love.'[1]

'Marriage is a bargain full of so many thorny circumstances, that it is hard for the will of a woman to keep to it long, with her whole self. The married state of men is a little better than that of women, yet even they find it a hard enough business.'[2]

Montaigne barely tried to clear the thorns for his wife. Chivalry was not what he made for. He gave her a free hand, but a dull existence.

'The most useful and honourable knowledge and occupation for the mother of a family is knowledge concerning her household. . . . Experience hath taught me to demand of a married woman, above all other virtues, the virtue of household economy. I give her scope, for by my absence I leave all domestic government in her hands. In more homes than one I see—and I see it with anger—that Monsieur comes back about noon in the sulks,

[1] *Essais*, iii. 5 : 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 35 : 'De trois bonnes femmes.'

boiling over with business worries, to find Madame still doing her hair and dressing up in her closet. That is a fashion only for queens. . . . It is absurd and unjust that the idleness of our women should be nourished on our sweat and our labour. If the husband provide the substance, Nature herself demands that woman should provide the form. . . .' 'Marriage meaneth a kind of converse which easily cooleth through propinquity—a converse which is harmed by assiduity. Every strange woman seemeth unto us a comely woman; and every man knoweth by experience that the continual sight of one another cannot give the pleasure which cometh of taking and leaving by fits and starts. As for me, these interruptions fill me with a fresh love towards my family, and restore me in pleasanter fashion to the groove of my home. . . . And I know that kindliness hath arms long enough to stretch and join across from one corner of the world to another—more especially this married sort of kindliness, in the which there existeth a constant intercommunication of services which awaken obligation and remembrance.[1]

Montaigne, it will be seen, took various

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

measures to avoid this 'continual sight of one another,' chief among them the tower that he built for himself, into which his wife might not enter. That she might find his restrictions tedious never troubled his head. He graciously allowed her, it is true, to dabble in a little village doctoring. In his own home, he wrote, it happened that his wife had a store of 'paltry' drugs and medicines for the benefit of the people, and she 'used the same medicine for fifty different maladies'—medicines that she would not take herself; then she 'triumphed in the wonderful results.'[1]

From all this, however, it is hard to gather their permanent relations to one another. That they were not warm is apparent. When Montaigne says, that the best treatment for feminine grievances is indulgent but unremitting silence, the advice is too particular not to be personal. And so is such a comment as—

'Folk say that Gascon heads have this prerogative—that you can more easily make a man bite hot iron, than make a Gascon woman loose her teeth from an opinion that she has conceived in temper. And blows and compulsion exasperate her.'[2]

[1] *Essais*, ii. 37 : 'De la Ressemblance des enfants aux pères.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 32 : 'Défence de Sénèque et de Plutarque.'

Madame de Montaigne was probably something of a scold, and was undeterred by her husband's formidable speechlessness—'Very virtuous, though not always able to listen to virtue,' to quote his words. 'The fault is committed, God forgive me!' was an entry said to be in his diary, in which, it is reported, he confessed that in one of the *Essays*,[1] 'for this once only he had taken his wife for a subject.'

As time went on they evidently got used to one another and arrived at a *modus vivendi*. At any rate, we find him dedicating to her La Boétie's French version of Plutarch's 'Letter of Consolation to his Wife,' a fact which has significance, as it followed close upon the death of their eldest child. 'My wife,' it runs, 'you understand well enough that according to present fashions it is not the right thing for a man of the world still to court and to caress you; for men say that a clever man can quite well take a woman to himself, but that it is a fool's part to marry her. Let them talk; I, for my part, cling to the simple ways of old times. It is for love of them that I trim my hair as I do. . . . Let us live—you and I, my wife—in the old French fashion.'

[1] *Essais*, ii. 31: 'De la Colère.'

He follows this by reminding her of La Boétie's writings; and then, 'a wish took me,' he continued, 'to communicate them to my friends. And because I have, I think, none more familiar than you, I send you the consolatory letter of Plutarch to his wife . . . vexed as I am that fortune hath made this gift so appropriate to you. . . . I leave to Plutarch the office of consoling you and of showing you what is your duty.'[1]

It was a softer moment than usual when Montaigne, the witness of her sorrow, wrote these words. But, at other times, he was not without consideration for her. Some years later, when he had a fall from his horse, and she hearing the news, hastened out to meet him, and beheld him stretched helpless upon a litter, his first thought on returning to consciousness was that a horse should be provided for her, lest the rough road should fatigue her feet.

She was no doubt an excellent nurse. But she was also evidently a conventional woman, and Montaigne, although he demanded decorum, had no use for conventionality. When he found that his only daughter, Lénor, had the same ordinary disposition, he abandoned her education to her mother, leaving every-

[1] *Lettres de Montaigne*: 'A ma femme.'

thing in her hands, excepting the matter of truthfulness. Lénor's *franchise* he looked after himself. But it must be admitted that he had no natural paternal feeling. Six girls were born to him, of whom only one survived infancy. When he was asked how many children he had had, he could not remember, and he misdated the death of his eldest daughter. 'I know nothing,' he says, 'of that strong tie which is said to bind men to the future by the children who transmit their name and their honour. . . . Already, of myself, I cling only too much to this life and to the world; I am quite contented to be in the hands of fortune by reason of all the essential facts of being, without otherwise prolonging her jurisdiction over me; and I have never thought that to be without children was a lack which would make life less complete or less contented. The vocation of sterility certainly has its advantages.'[1]

'Now if we grant this simple fact, that we love our children because we have engendered them, wherefore we call them our other selves, it seemeth as if there were another kind of progeny which cometh forth from us, the which is of no less value. For the beings that we

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

engender by our souls, the birth of our spirit, our courage, our intelligence, are produced by a part of us nobler than the body. They are still more our own ; in this act of generation we are both father and mother to them. This offspring costs us much dearer and bringeth us in more honour—that is if they show anything of good. The worth of our other children is a great deal more theirs than ours, the part we have in them is a very slight one ; but of these others, all the beauty and the grace and the price are our own. And so they represent and record us by far more vitally than the rest.' [1]

There is no apathy here. Montaigne leaves us in no doubt about his love for his works—the children of his brain. Would he have said the same things of his other children if he had had a son ?

It is pleasant to remember that when he was on his travels among the Alps, his only comment upon a certain walk that he took was that it would not have been too much for his little girl. To remember her thus she must have pleased him. But he did not take an interest in her. His interest was all in mind and character ; he seemed too intel-

[1] *Essais*, ii. 8: 'De l'Affection des pères aux enfants,'

lectual to be a father—too intellectual and too lazy, for he could make no effort over his natural inclinations. Perhaps, too, he had too poor an idea of woman to draw much out of a daughter. Indulgent contempt does not make a very fruitful atmosphere, and it was with indulgent contempt that Montaigne surrounded his womankind. This, not confidence, was the motive which prompted him to leave Lénor's upbringing to her mother.

'It is only reasonable,' he writes, 'to allow the administration of affairs to mothers before their children reach the age prescribed by law at which they themselves can be responsible. But that father would have reared them ill who could not hope that in their maturity they would have more wisdom and more competence than his wife.'[1]

'We train them [girls] from childhood upwards, for the enterprises of love. Their grace, their dress, their knowledge, their speech, all their education, concerns this end, and this alone. Their governesses impress nothing on them but the face of this love—even when they do so thus continually for the purpose of giving them a distaste for it. My daughter, the only child I have, is now of an age to

[1] *Essais*, ii. 8 : 'De l'Affection des pères aux enfants.'

marry. She is of a slow constitution, thin and namby-pamby. She has been brought up in this fashion by her mother, and is only now just beginning to put away the simple follies of childhood. The other day, while I was present, she was reading a French book, and the word *fouteau* turned up—the name of a well-known tree.[1] Her governess stopped her rather roughly and made her slur over this difficult place. I left her alone, that I might not disturb their rules and regulations, for I never meddle with this government of theirs. Feminine policy has a mysterious course, and we must just let them go on their way ; but if I am not mistaken, the conversation of twenty lackeys would not have done as much to imprint upon her imagination the understanding and the use of these sealed syllables as the reprimand of that old woman.'[2]

Montaigne would always have preferred the company of lackeys to that of the old woman, for his daughter as well as for himself. Had she been more of a character, she might have interested him. We know little of her later, excepting that after her father's death she gave all his books to the Grand-Vicar of the Archbishopric of Auch, a detail which does not

[1] Beech tree. [2] *Essais*, iii. 5 : 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'

raise her in our esteem. She was probably formal and correct. And yet in spite of the father's cold words, it is a pleasant picture: that of the panelled parlour, and the dull young girl reading her book, and the stiff governess, probably most anxious to conceal her ignorance before Montaigne; and the philosopher himself, leaning back in his armchair, dressed in black (he wore nothing but black or white), his fur-trimmed cap upon his head, Virgil or Plutarch's *Lives* in his hand, as he watched from under his eyes, and kept his formidable smile —his yet more formidable silence.

After all, if Montaigne's marriage was not ideal, it was not entirely his fault. Had he known nobler or more intelligent women, his standard would probably have altered. His friendship at the end of his life with the intellectual Mademoiselle de Gournay, his *fille d'alliance*, although it involved the flattery of a young girl's adulation of a great man already growing old, was not devoid of significance. Nor was he without his notions of happy marriage: for him it would always have lain in friendship. But women, he complains, are incapable of this sort of feeling.

'Apart from the fact that marriage is a bargain, the which hath nothing free but the

entrance into it; apart from the time that it lasteth, its compulsory character, its dependence on things other than our wills (and it is a bargain which is struck for ends beyond itself); apart from all this, I say, there are a thousand unforeseen rockets to ward off, each enough to snap the thread and disturb the course of a warm affection. In marriage such things happen where, in friendship, intercourse concerneth friendship's self alone. But, truth to say, the normal woman is not capable of the converse—the companionship, which is the nurse of that holy bond; nor doth her soul seem strong enough to sustain the pressure of a knot so close and so enduring. Otherwise, if there could but exist a free and voluntary relationship, wherein not only the spirit would have entire enjoyment, but also the body . . . wherein the whole man would be engaged—if this might be, then it is certain that friendship would thereby be made stronger and fuller. But we have no instance that this sex hath ever achieved anything of the kind.'[1]

And yet, if she did, 'No woman who had relished the taste thereof would fill the post of mistress to her husband. If she be lodged

[1] *Essais*, i. 28: 'De l'Amitié.'

in his affection as his wife, she is far more safely and more honourably lodged. . . . The fact that happy marriage is so rare is a sign of its value. When we fashion it finely and take it the right way, there is no nobler institution in society.'[1]

With his strange power of intellectual impartiality, Montaigne could even look at women's circumstances with justice; he was almost a champion of their rights.

'Women,' he says, 'are not the least in the wrong when they refuse the rules of life obtaining in the world; it is the men who made these laws without them.'[2]

'Male and female are cast in the same mould; excepting for habits and institutions, the difference is not considerable. Plato invites the one and the other indifferently to companionship in all studies, all forms of exercise and offices, all vocations in his Republic, whether warlike or peaceful; and the philosopher Antisthenes admitted no distinction between their virtue and ours. It is much easier to accuse one sex than to excuse another.'[3]

To be just is the next best thing to being

[1] *Essais*, iii. 5: 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*

chivalrous, and Montaigne was eminently just. He was never a bully; what is more, he was nearly always good tempered. But when he lost control, he lost it handsomely. 'When I get angry, I get violently angry, but as quickly and secretly as I can. . . . I go about scattering indiscriminately all the insulting words I can find, never seeing whether my arrows hit pertinently where I compute they would hurt most—for I usually use nothing but my tongue. . . . In proportion as age maketh my temper sharper, I study how I may resist it, and I shall contrive henceforth, if I can, so that I become the less morose and hard to please the more excuse and inclination I have to be so.'[1]

With his servants, he tells us, he occasionally became deliberately enraged, 'for the sake of the proper discipline of the household'; but such gusts passed in a moment. He made a rule of 'economising anger instead of lavishing it at any price, for to do that taketh away its weight and its effect; shrill screaming, grown common . . . becometh a habit, and every one treateth it with contempt. If you cry out upon a servant for a theft, he will not mind at all if he hath heard you use the same

[1] *Essais*, ii. 31; 'De la Colère.'

tone a hundred times when he hath only placed a seat wrongly, or when he hath not rinsed a glass out well. And people must never get vaguely angry ; they must take care that reproof reacheth the person of whom they complain ; for usually they begin to shout at him before he hath come into their presence, and they go on shouting for an age after he hath left it.'[1]

He was an indulgent master, probably rather lax about the servants' conduct, so long as they did their work well. 'I make few inquiries,' he said, 'about a footman's morals, I find out whether he is industrious. And I am not so much afraid of a muleteer who gambleth as of one who is an imbecile ; or of a cook who sweareth as of one who is ignorant.'[2]

And he trusted his servants—more from indolence, perhaps, than from any confidence he had in their honour :

'Whoso hath charge of my purse on a journey, hath entire charge, free from control. . . . I lend a hand to my own ignorance, and purposely keep a confused and uncertain account of my money ; up to a certain point I am glad to feel doubtful on this matter.

[1] *Essais*, ii. 31 : 'De la Colère.'
[2] *Essais*, i. 28 : 'De l'Amitié.'

One must leave a little room for the disloyalty or imprudence of one's valet. If we ourselves have enough money left, in all, to do what we want . . . we can leave some margin for his benefit—the portion of the gleaner.'[1]

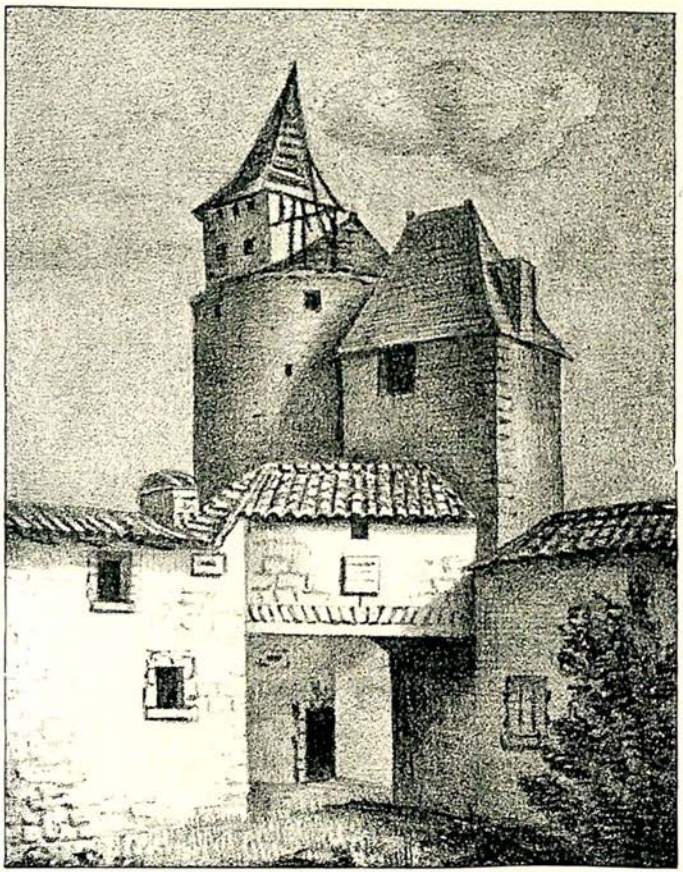
He therefore had as few attendants as was then possible; a retinue oppressed him.

'The most foolish figure that a man can cut in his own house is when we see him hampered by the arrangements of his household—whispering in the ear of one footman, threatening another with his eye. A household should glide on by imperceptible means and keep an ordinary course.

'To my mind, if we make any mention to our guests of the hospitality that we are giving them—whether to boast or to apologise—we are guilty of ugly manners.'[2]

Of Montaigne's household, hospitality, and habits we probably know more homely detail than we do concerning those of any private man, excepting, perhaps, Dr. Johnson. It is a fascinating game to imagine these two apostles of common sense discussing, in Elysian fields, the ideal manner of life. They were at opposite ends of the pole. What would

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'
[2] *Ibid.*



THE TOWER OF MONTAIGNE'S HOUSE IN 1823.

Johnson have said to Montaigne's tower? But Montaigne's tower was the centre of his whole scheme of existence; it made his house a symbol of his creed; to know him, we must begin by entering it.

'Every man,' he wrote, 'should have a back-shop all his own . . . in the which he can establish his true liberty, his chief refuge, his best solitude. And here it is that he must hold his ordinary intercourse with himself.'[1]

'Miserable, to my way of thinking, is he who hath no place where he can be at home to himself; where he can privily court himself; where he can hide himself. To me, it is much more bearable to be always alone than never.'[2]

So, on one side of his dwelling-house, he built himself a tower to which he could retire to live at ease; and here he spent most of his days. The average man, when he is bored by family existence, goes into the world, and distracts himself by politics or business. Montaigne said that he had used all his store of ambition for La Boétie, and had none left for himself. But the truth was that he was naturally indolent, and even had he not had a

[1] *Essais*, i. 39: 'De la Solitude.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 3: 'De trois Commerces.'

distaste for affairs, it suited him better to have one minute's walk to his refuge than to seek it outside with any effort.

Nobody might enter his tower, least of all his wife. As for friends, no doubt his cronies and fellow-scholars were permitted to find him there, but his visitors had to come on his own terms. He never escorted them to the door. He knew, he said, that they liked it, but it went against his grain, and he thought it better to offend people whom he only saw occasionally, than to offend himself every day. On the third floor of his tower he had a bedroom in which to rest, or spend the night, should he desire to escape from home. On the ground floor was his chapel, so that he could hear Mass thence in comfort, as he lay in bed above. There was a picture here of St. Michael and the Dragon—the picture which, no doubt, supplied the opportunist, Montaigne, with his analogy, when he wrote about his willingness to carry a candle in one hand for St. Michael, and a candle for the Dragon in the other. But it was the floor above the chapel—the second floor—which was the important one. This was the floor of the library—the *raison d'être* of the 'back-shop.' Another small chamber led out of it,

a warmer place where Montaigne could avoid draughts, an annex of the larger room, added later. And yet it was more than an annex—it was a complement. We must look at it before we linger in the library—it has its own significance ; it was Montaigne's closet of recreation ; it represented his tastes. The walls were decorated with such works as pleased him : pictures of subjects taken from Ovid—of Venus, Mars, and Vulcan, of Cymon and Pero ; over the door was Venus reposing, below it a mysterious picture of two ships, the one almost foundering, the other in full sail, while some swimmers are making towards the shore. Might not this doorway with its paintings stand for the entrance into Montaigne's thought—for its symbol ? Pleasure at rest in security, presiding over the ship of philosophy—Hedonist philosophy—which is making safe way over the sea ; while its unwise fellow-ship—the ship, who knows of what dream or ideal ?—sinks with all its crew, unless it be for a few desperate strugglers who try for land they may never reach. Perhaps the other ornaments of Montaigne's cabinet, a collection of barbaric instruments of music, add the finishing touch to the image, and stand for that untiring curiosity about every

form of life—the stranger the better—which was an integral part of Montaigne's code. They were more characteristic than the inscription that went round the room, for the inscription was what Montaigne thought himself to be, not what he was. 'In the year of our Lord, 1571,' it ran, 'at the age of thirty-eight, on the last day of February, being the anniversary of his birth, Monsieur de Montaigne, long weary of the service of the Court and of public employments [this meant no more than his magistracy and two or three public missions, besides a few visits to Royalty—for he was not made a mayor till eleven years later], 'while still in his full vigour, betook himself to the bosom of the learned Virgins, where, if the fates permit, he may pass in calm and freedom from all cares what little shall yet remain of his allotted time, now more than half run out. This his ancestral abode and sweet retreat he hath consecrated to his freedom, tranquillity, and leisure.'[1]

So much for the closet. We may close its door and enter the library. Here, over the shelves of choice editions, a thousand in all—tooled volumes, red, brown, and gold—there ran, round the frieze, a different legend—one

[1] *Montaigne*: Dowden.

from the heart. This hall of letters, this home of Montaigne's mind, was dominated by the memory of La Boétie. 'Inasmuch,' it stood written, 'as he desired that there should be some unique memorial of his most sweet, most dear, and most close companion, than whom our age hath seen none better, none more learned, none more graceful, none more absolutely perfect, Michel de Montaigne, unhappily bereft of so beloved a guardian of his life, mindful of their mutual affection and of the kindly feeling which united them, hath set up, since nought more expressive could be found, this learned shelf, a special laboratory for the mind, in the which is his delight.'

The bare rafters above the frieze were a library in themselves, a book of aphorisms which summed up Montaigne's mind, for they were covered by fifty-four sayings from Homer, Plato, St. Paul, the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Epictetus, Herodotus, Terence, Persius, Horace, Pliny, Lucretius, Martial, and L'Hôpital, the one modern among them. 'Who knoweth if what men call dying be not living, what men call living be not dying?' is one sentence; 'The for and the against are both possible,' is another. And here are a few more from the collection :—

'Men are perturbed not by things themselves, but by the opinions they have of things.'

'The judgments of the Lord are like the great deep.'

'Be not wise in your own conceit: God made man like to a shadow, of which who shall judge when the sun hath set?'

'Be not wise above that which is usual, but be soberly wise.'

'Guiding ourselves by custom and the senses.'

'Rejoice in those things that are present—all else is beyond thee.'

'It may be and it may not be.'

'I determine nothing. I do not comprehend things, I suspend judgment, I examine.'

Or this briefer summary of true agnosticism:

'In equilibrium.'

Or these words from Terence:

'I am a man, and nothing human is alien to me.'

The books that La Boétie had left him formed the nucleus of the library; the rest, and they were many, had been added. They were scattered we know not when, and only

seventy-six have been re-discovered, among them *Cæsar's Commentaries* with Montaigne's name inside it, bought for ninepence on the quays of Paris. Some of them are annotated by him, in some he has written a final criticism. Nearly half of them are history; thirty-one are works in Latin, two in Greek. There is a large proportion of modern poets: Baïf (he put great faith in the Pléiade), Petrarch, Boccaccio. There must also have been an Ariosto—his fine comparison of him with Virgil proves his knowledge. There were probably, too, manuscripts of ballads—of the 'popular, purely national poetry' which has, he says, 'graces and simplicities in the which it may compare with the chief beauties of the perfect poetry of art.'[1] For mediocrity alone he had no houseroom. 'Mediocre poetry, which sticks between the two, is a thing for scorn, dishonoured and worthless.'[2] . . . 'We have many more poets,' he adds, 'than judges and interpreters of poetry. It is easier to make it than to know it.'[3]

And certainly there was a Rabelais; he knew his writing well and misunderstood him. Was

[1] *Essais*, i. 54: 'Des vaines subtilités.'
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Essais*, i. 37: 'Du jeune Caton.'

Montaigne too near him to see his meaning? Like Ronsard, he treated him as a buffoon. Other authors, more admired by him, had evidently a place in his shelves. He was versed in modern history, had read Guicciardini and found his cynicism shallow, was steeped in Commines and had unbounded admiration for his moral force. But his favourites were always among the classics. Plutarch, Seneca, Virgil, were the three gods of his adoration; Homer was almost their rival, *Cæsar's Commentaries* ran them close, and Terence and Lucan followed after. Tacitus was to him 'a nursery-garden of discourses political and ethical';[1] Cicero he disliked, because he was eloquent for the sake of eloquence.

But Montaigne was at his best with Plutarch and with Virgil. Plutarch's *Lives* were his Bible, as far as he had any Bible—the book in which he sometimes recognised the higher possibilities of human nature. 'He is,' he wrote, 'so full, so universal, that on every occasion he fits himself to your business and holds out to you a generous hand—a hand inexhaustible in its gifts of wealth and of beauty.'[2] As for Virgil, he filled him with

[1] *Essais*, iii. 8: 'De l'Art de conférer.'

[2] *Essais*, iii. 5: 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'

a kind of passionate enchantment. It is curious that Montaigne, who had not the poet's temperament, should have been such an ardent reader of poetry. It had the power to carry him away. Only 'to a low degree can it be judged by set precepts and by art. But the good, the excessive, the divine, is above rules and above reason. Whoever looketh upon her beauty with steady, unwinking sight, seeth her no more than he would see the splendour of a flash of lightning. She doth not exercise our judgment, she ravisheth, she ravageth it. . . . From my earliest childhood, poetry hath had this power—the power to pierce me through and to transport me.'[1] And of all the poets, Virgil 'pierced' him deepest—Virgil, 'who soareth aloft with full-spread wings, ever following his point with a high pitch and a strong'—while Ariosto (with whom he contrasts him) is fain, 'for fear his breath should fail him, to sit down at every field's end.' No modern literary *gourmet* could be more sensitive than Montaigne was about Virgil. He brooked no banalities. There was nothing that irritated him more than the *Oh, que c'est beau!* which generally followed, he says, the reading of the *Æneid*. Concerning all the

[1] *Essais*, i. 37: 'Du jeune Caton.'

ancients, indeed, his enthusiasm is untiring, and his criticism of delicate penetration. 'I can see,' he writes, 'that Latin allureth me by its gracious dignity more than it hath the right to do—just as if I were a child or an illiterate person.'

And of the Greeks: 'Their writings do not only fill and satisfy me, but they . . . transfix me with admiration. I judge of their beauty; I behold it, if not completely, to its utmost bounds, at least so far that it is impossible for me to aspire thereunto.'[1]

'What glory can compare with that of Homer? There is nothing which liveth on the lips of men like unto his name and his works; nothing so widely known and welcomed as Troy and Helen and her wars, the which very likely never happened.'[2]

His judgment of these classics is larger and finer than it is of later authors.

'The constant intercourse I hold with the humours of the ancients, and the image of these rich spirits of bygone times, doth (he writes), perchance, disgust me with other people and with myself.'[3]

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 36: 'Des plus excellents hommes.'
[3] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.

'When I put myself by the side of those men, and see how feeble and puny I am, how heavy, how asleep, I feel pity—or contempt—for myself. And yet there is one thing that gratifieth me—that my opinions have the honour very often to coincide with theirs, and that if I see, at least I see with their vision, however far I lag behind them. And then I have the power—not vouchsafed to every man—to know the extreme difference that existeth between them and me. . . . He must have very strong legs who undertaketh to walk abreast of those people.'[1]

'I knew the Capitol and the map thereof before I knew the Louvre; and the Tiber before the Seine. I have borne in mind the circumstances and fortunes of Lucullus, Metellus, and Scipio more continually than those of any men now among us. . . . In truth, my humour leadeth me to be more zealous to serve the dead; they can no longer help themselves, and so, it seemeth to me, they need my help all the more. . . . Since I find myself of no use to this mine own age, I throw myself back upon that other.'[2]

The ancients were no dead authors to

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

Montaigne. In this, he is a modern of the moderns. His love, his knowledge of them were so vivid that they nourished him, became part of his daily life. He used them not remotely, but colloquially, borrowing their words and translating them into the idiom of his day. This, to him, seemed their true use, such plagiarism his right as their lover. Plagiarism, indeed, did not exist for him any more than it did for Shakespeare. But Montaigne took more consciously than Shakespeare, and professed plagiarism as his creed. He passed his own laws. It was his business to loot only what he could assimilate and thus transform and make his own.

'I fly here and there, pecking off from books the sentences that please me, not to keep them, for I have no cupboards, but to transport them.'[1]

'He (the reader) must drink up their moisture, not learn their precepts. He may, if he likes, forget boldly whence he hath them, so long as he knoweth how to appropriate them. Truth and reason are common to all men, and belong no more to him who spake them first than to him who spake them afterwards. Such and such a saying is no more

[1] *Essais*, i. 25: 'Du Pédantisme.'

Plato's than it is mine, sith that he and I see and understand in the same fashion. The bees pillage the flowers, here, there, everywhere, but then they make honey from their takings, and the honey is all theirs: it is no longer thyme or marjoram. And thus it standeth with him who borroweth from other authors. He will fuse them and transform them, to make thereof a venture all his own.'[1]

Thus Montaigne spent his hours—sipping, settling, flitting with deliberation through his library. Here, too, he jotted down and rewrote his *Essays*—the harvest from his books and from his life. He took his labours easily, and we need by no means picture him as always reading or writing in his hermitage. He loved idling there by himself, or with no other companion than his cat. This cat he delighted in watching, much as Anatole France likes to watch his dog.

'When,' he says, 'I play with my cat, who knoweth whether she is using me as a way of passing her time even more than I use her for the same purpose? We entertain one another reciprocally with our cunning tricks.

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'

If I have my hour for advancing or refusing, so hath she.'[1]

Montaigne was not merely amused by animals, he had a real love for them. 'Considering,' he said, 'that the same Master hath given us lodging in this palace for his service, and that they belong, like us, to his family, Nature hath good reason to enjoin upon us some kind of esteem and affection towards them. . . . Indeed, when all is said, there existeth a common human duty, a certain respect the which attacheth us not only to the beasts who have life and sentiment, but even to the trees and plants. We owe justice to men, and grace and benignity to the other creatures, who are not capable of justice. There is a sort of intercourse between them and us, and a sort of mutual obligation.'[2]

We hear nothing of Montaigne's dog, if he had one, but his horse played a part in his life; riding was his favourite form of exercise, even when he was ill and in pain. But for sport he did not care at all, nor for any species of athletics. He did not, he said, take after his agile father. 'There was no man of *his* age to be found,' he tells us, 'who could rival

[1] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 11: 'De la Cruauté.'

him in bodily exercise, just as I hardly ever find any one who cannot outdo me, save in running, in the which I used to have a mediocre success. . . . In dancing and tennis, in wrestling, I have never been able to acquire more than a very slight and ordinary efficiency; in swimming, fencing, vaulting, and jumping, none at all.'[1]

Accomplishments were not in Montaigne's line: no one could teach him to play on any instrument, and his voice was what he called 'inept.' 'My hands,' he says, 'are so clumsy that I cannot even write properly myself, so that when I have finished a scrawl, I had rather rewrite it than give myself the trouble of deciphering it; and my reading is very little better. . . . Although otherwise a good clerk, I do not know how to close up a letter rightly.'[2] . . . 'I would rather compose two letters than fold one, and always leave this task to some one else.'[3] . . . Nor have I ever been able to cut a pen, nor carve decently at table, nor harness a horse, nor carry a bird on my wrist and let it loose, nor speak to dogs, or birds, or horses. My bodily conditions agree, in brief, with those of my soul; they show

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.' [2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Essais*, i. 40: 'Considération sur Cicéron.'

nothing gay and alert, only a full and steady vigour. I stand hardship well; but I stand it only so far as my own desires lead me thereunto; otherwise, unless my palate is tickled by some pleasure involved therein, if I have no other guide than just my will, I am no good at it at all. . . . And as up to this hour I have known no commander, no mastering force, I have marched pretty straight forward at what pace I liked. This hath slackened my fibre and made me useless for the service of others, and no good excepting to myself. . . . It hath made me delicate of temperament and incapable of worry—to such a point that I like people to hide from me my losses and any kind of disturbance that may affect me. I allow in my current expenses for what my nonchalance costeth me in food and maintenance; and I like not to know the sum I have in hand, that I may feel my losses the less exactly. As for those who live with me, I pray of them, when affection for me faileth them, together with all its kind results, to take me in with pleasant seemings. For want, indeed, of sufficient strength to suffer the importunity of the adverse accidents to the which we are subject, and because I do not hold myself called to regulate and order our

affairs, I abandon myself to fortune, and nourish within myself—as far as I can—this opinion: that it is best to take all things at their worst, and, as for that worst, to resolve to bear it gently and patiently.'[1]

It was characteristic of Montaigne that he not only knew, but enjoyed his limitations. His own frankness amused him. 'I have not,' he says, 'like Socrates, corrected my natural temperament by the force of reason, and I have not disturbed my instincts by any arts. As I came, so I let myself go on.'[2] If he exaggerated, it was not on the side of his virtues. Some foibles that he describes are hard to believe in. Was his talk, for instance, so dull as he makes out? 'In conversation,' he tells us, 'I feel myself weighing heavy on my listeners.'[3] . . . 'If I grow so bold as to break my thread ever so little, I never fail to lose it altogether, and that makes my speech dry and crabbed and constrained . . . my mind is slow and woolly, the least want of clearness sendeth me off my point—any subtlety, howso trivial, will hinder me. My apprehension is slow and confused, but

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 12: 'De la Physionomie.'
[3] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'

what it hath once grasped, it graspeth well, and embraceth it very closely and deeply and widely, so long as it keepeth hold thereof.'[1]

He was evidently the constant victim of his own absence of mind, and that was partly the result of that amazingly bad memory to which he devotes such vivid pages. When something that he wanted in his library came into his head, he had to 'confide his need to some one else'—even when it was something he wanted to write about—for fear of forgetting it while he crossed the courtyard between his tower and the house. He took three hours to learn two verses of poetry. When he called his servants, he called them by the names of their functions or their countryside, because he could not remember other names. It came easier to him, he said, to know that a name had three syllables, or an ugly sound, or ended with such and such a letter, 'than to recall it'; 'and if,' he adds, 'I should have a long life, I believe that I should forget my own name. So greatly do I excel in forgetfulness, that even my writings . . . are forgotten with the rest. The public dealeth me blows about them, and I do not feel them.'[2]

Montaigne was made up of little tastes and

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17 : 'De la Présomption.' [2] *Ibid.*

habits, not one of which has he left unchronicled, even to the way in which he rubbed his ears, 'scratching being one of Nature's sweetest gratifications.' . . . 'I move with difficulty,' he wrote, 'and am dilatory in all things: in getting up, in going to bed, at my meals. Seven o'clock is early for me, and where I am master I never dine before eleven, or sup till after six.[1] . . .

These were his only two meals; he required nine hours for sleep, but he never napped in the day; he was particular about going booted and braced. 'I like,' he says, 'to be shaved after dinner, and find it as difficult to leave off my gloves as my chemise; nor can I do without washing when I rise, and when I get up from table; or without the ceiling and curtains of my bed—things very necessary to me. . . . I wear no more covering on my leg or thigh in winter than in summer. . . . I would willingly dine without a tablecloth, but I should not at all like to dine without a napkin such as they use in Germany. I soil it more than either Germans or Italians, and seek but little help from spoon or fork; and I regret that we do not still follow a fashion that I once

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'

saw started, in imitation of royalty—that we should have our napkins changed like our plates, after every course.[1] . . . A crowd of dishes and courses displeaseth me, as crowds always do. I am easily satisfied with a few. I usually eat salted meats, and I prefer bread without salt. My household baker, contrary to custom hereabouts, makes no other sort for me.[2] . . . I am not excessively fond of salads or of fruits, excepting melons. My father hated every kind of sauce; I love them all. . . . I am greedy about fish. My *jours maigres* turn into my *jours gras*, and fast-days are my feast-days. . . . As for fasting, I used to practise it to keep my vigour in good condition for some activity of mind or body. For repletion, in my case, hath a cruelly sluggish effect upon activity. Above all, I detest a foolish marriage between this healthy happy little goddess (of appetite) with that roasting little god of indigestion, all puffed out with fumes of his own wine. . . .'[3] 'It is most unseemly, besides being injurious to health, even to pleasure, to gobble as I do. I often bite my tongue, sometimes my fingers, from sheer haste. . . . There were men at

[1] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'
[2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

Rome who taught graceful mastication, like graceful walking. In my hurry, I lose leisure for talk—that pleasant seasoning of the dinner-table.[1]

As for intercourse at meal-times:

'I hate the idea of being compelled to have my mind in the clouds, while I have my body at table . . . when I dance, I dance; when I sleep, I sleep: in like fashion, when I take a stroll alone in a beautiful orchard, if for part of the time my thoughts are taken up with other topics, for another part I bring them back to my walk, to the orchard, to the sweetness of this solitude, and to myself.'[2]

But he did not set out for this walk upon getting up from table. His gastronomics foreshadow those of men to come—of future Herbert Spencers—and he had his code for conduct after meals.

'I like to rest a long time after them, and to hear other folk talk, provided I have nothing to do with it. For I grow fatigued, and harm myself by talking with a full stomach—as much as I gain by the exercise of shouting and arguing before a meal, the which habit I find most wholesome and pleasant. . . .

[1] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.' [2] *Ibid.*

I like a hard bed, and I never use a warming-pan; but since I have grown old, they give me blankets to warm my feet and stomach. . . . And I like to take my rest, whether lying down or sitting, with my legs as high as the seat, or higher.'[1]

His orchard strolls were never connected with business. He left the management of the estate to his wife, on the plea that he knew nothing of affairs.

'I was born and reared,' he tells us, 'among the fields. . . . I have not a notion how to reckon, either in my head or with my pen. There is hardly a coin that I can recognise; I do not know one grain from another, whether still growing or in the granary, unless the difference is very marked; and I barely know the difference between the cabbage and lettuce of my garden. I do not even understand the names of the most elementary household utensils, or the crudest principle of agriculture, such as every child hath by heart.[2] 'And what would I not do rather than read a contract—rather than go on shaking dusty papers, making myself the serf of my affairs, or, worse still, of the affairs of others,

[1] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'

as so many men do, if they are paid for it? My one aim is to turn myself into a cow and a don't-care.'[1] . . .

'My father loved to build Montaigne, where he was born, and in all the arrangement of my household I like making use of his example and his rules, and I shall bind my successors, as far as I can, unto the same. . . . If I have attempted to finish some old bit of a wall or repair some piece of the building, it hath been out of respect to him rather than for my own contentment. . . . For as far as my private inclinations go, neither this pleasure in building—the which is said to be so attractive—nor hunting, nor gardens, nor any other joys of a secluded life, have much power to amuse me. I would rather be a good groom than a good logician.'

'One of my wishes at this moment is to find a son-in-law who would know how to soothe and cosset my old age, and into whose hands I could abdicate . . . the government and use of my property.'[2]

This Montaigne painted by Montaigne, this man, slow and sluggish, must none the less have had a potent charm which drew men to him—the unconscious charm

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.' [2] *Ibid.*

of genius. It showed in his looks, and what he deemed the 'frankness' of his face twice acted as a talisman and saved his life. The first time was during the wars of religion, when every man's hand was against every man, and a treacherous friend of Montaigne's asked him for shelter for himself and his followers, meaning to make the hospitality for which he begged the pretext for taking the château. Montaigne's boast was that his house was as open as his face, and even in this time of civil war he kept it undefended. He got scent of the plot, yet he did nothing, and when the traitor arrived he opened his doors. But there was something in the host's candid countenance that converted the guest, and when his soldiers marched in after him they were amazed at his order to follow him at once and depart. The second time, a few years later, Montaigne, travelling not far from Paris, fell into the hands of robbers. They took his purse and papers, they were about to take his life, when this same something in his face disarmed them. They restored his stolen goods, they spoke to him courteously and let him go.

One would like to know more about the circle upon whom Montaigne's power was

exercised. It was a restricted one. After losing the one perfect friend, he chose to have few others.

'We live,' he says, 'in an age which only bringeth forth mediocrities, so much so that I find nothing worthy of great admiration. And thus it is that I hardly know any men intimately enough to be able to judge of them. Those among whom my circumstances generally throw me are, for the most part, persons who care little for the cultivation of the intellect—who have been shown no ideal of happiness but honour, no perfection excepting that of valiance.'[1]

And of these few, like other lazy, self-contented persons, he preferred those below to those above him.

'I willingly give myself to small folk, whether it be because that way there lieth more glory, or else through natural compassion, the which hath infinite power over me.'[2]

There were two or three of the great folk whom he also affected, men like the noble Minister, Michel de l'Hôpital, or that most magnetic Prince, Henri de Navarre. And there

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'

were old friends—Councillor Lansac, to whom he inscribed La Boétie's translation of Xenophon ; or Henri de Mesme, to whom he dedicated his friend's version of Plutarch's *Rules of Marriage*, in the hope that Madame de Mesme might see how her goodness had made laws for itself which the greatest philosophers could not surpass ; and 'Mademoiselle' Le Paulmier (born de Chaumont), a note to whom remains as a proof that he could show all the drawing-room graces when he wished to do so. 'Mademoiselle,' it runs, 'my friends know that from the first moment that I saw you I destined one of my books for you, for I felt you had done them great honour. But the courtesy of Monsieur Paulmier made it impossible for me to give it to you, for that he hath since then laid me under obligations much greater than the worth of my book. You will please accept it as being yours before I owed it as a debt ; and you will do me this grace—to love it either for the love of him, or for the love of me. And I meanwhile shall keep entire the debt I owe to Monsieur Paulmier, so as to avenge it—that is, if I can—by doing him some kind of service.'[1]

Mademoiselle Le Paulmier was not alone.

[1] *Lettres de Montaigne*: A Mademoiselle Paulmier.

'Among the hundreds and hundreds of ladies I have known,' was one of Montaigne's phrases. And he is free with his mention of '*bouillons* made of Eryngium and Turkish grass,' which he had 'swallowed two or three times to please the ladies who offered him half of their portion, with a manner more sweet than my complaint was sour.' The *bouillons*, he adds, were as 'easy to take as they were useless in effect,'[1] but the ladies did not know that he thought so. Who were they all? Was one the widow against whom he warns beholders? 'Take no notice,' he says, 'of those moist eyes, that piteous voice; look rather at her bearing, her complexion, the roundness of her cheeks below her long veils; through these it is that she talks her native French.'[2] Had she tried her native French upon Montaigne?

Women were probably charmed and subjugated by his sunny selfishness—a steady reliable selfishness, better than the common sort, since it recognised that it should pay for its privileges by good temper.

'And for the friendship each man oweth unto himself,' he says, 'whoso knoweth and

[1] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 35: 'De trois bonnes femmes.'

practiseth the duties thereof, he belongeth to the Privy Closet of the Muses.'[1]

'As if our own death did not give us enough to fear, we load ourselves with that of our wives, our children, our servants. As if our own business did not bother us sufficiently, we have to set about tormenting ourselves and splitting our heads over the concerns of our friends and neighbours. . . .'

'And in that natural decline which maketh man importunate and burdensome to others, let him beware of being importunate and burdensome to himself. . . . Let him flatter and caress himself—above all things, let him be his own governor.'[2]

'The singular affection that I bear myself, as one who bringeth all back to himself and hardly spendeth anything outside,' so he defines his attitude. . . . 'All that other men distribute to an infinite multitude of friends and acquaintance, for their glory or their greatness, *I* carry home for myself and the repose of my spirit.'[3]

'I flee from melancholy humours and care-worn men, as I would flee from men stricken

[1] *Essais*, iii. 10: 'De ménager sa volonté.'
[2] *Essais*, i. 39: 'De la Solitude.'
[3] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'

by the plague; and, unless I am forced thereto by duty, I never mix myself up in subjects which I cannot treat without getting interested, or feeling emotion.'[1]

This sounds bad enough; but Montaigne knew himself when he wrote, 'I see much more clearly in serene weather.'[2] His happiness depended upon a calm, and his behaviour depended upon his happiness. 'To me,' he wrote, 'happiness is a singularly potent spur to moderation and to modesty.'[3] His happinesses were many, his sense of enjoyment as acute as that of youth. 'Others feel the pleasure of content and prosperity. So do I, but not as a something fleeting that slippeth past us. It must be chewed and studied, it is stuff for rumination. . . . And so that even my sleep should not thus stupidly escape me, I used to arrange to be disturbed, that I might at least half apprehend the joys thereof.'[4]

The crown of Montaigne's happiness—according to himself—was characteristic: it was the remembrance of other men's misfortunes.

'What a fine thing it is for the mind to

[1] *Essais*, iii. 10: 'De ménager sa volonté.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 2: 'Du Repentir.'
[3] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'
[4] *Essais*, iii. 13: De l'Expérience.'

find itself poised at such a point that no fear or doubt disturbeth the air—no difficulty past, present, or future, over which the imagination can flit, yet take no harm. This thought borroweth great lustre from comparison with other people's circumstances. And so I am always picturing, under a thousand forms, the lives of those whom fortune or their own mistakes have tossed and submerged.'[1]

Montaigne's fancy was of a strangely literal kind—of near kin to curiosity. Yet it belonged to the artist side of him—the side that gave him so much trouble.

He needed his own indulgence, for he found it no easy task to rule himself. Montaigne was, indeed, a dozen Montaignes, a man of impressions, of shifting moods.

'My feet are so unsteady, so unsure, so ready to totter and to feel the earth crumble beneath them—my eyesight is so ill-regulated—that when I fast, I am another man than he who hath eaten a repast; if health and the radiance of a fine day smile upon me, there I stand—a well-behaved man. If I have a corn pressing upon my heel, there I stand—glum, disagreeable, inaccessible.'[2]

[1] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'

[2] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.

Moral effort he thought a waste of nervous force.

'I have never put myself to great pains to curb the desires by the which I have found myself beset. My virtue is a virtue, or rather an innocence, which is purely random and accidental. . . . By lucky chance I come of a race famous for its honour, and of an excellent father. I know not whether some part of his tastes have passed into me; or whether home example, and the good teaching I had in childhood, have helped me without my being aware; or else whether I was born thus; but, anyhow, I hold most vices in abhorrence. . . . In more than one matter I find more steadiness and law in my morals than in my opinions: my appetites are less corrupt than my reason.'[1]

'Among other vices, I cruelly hate cruelty, both by nature and by my judgment, as the extreme of all wickedness; I carry my feeling to such a degree of softness that I cannot see the neck of a fowl wrung without displeasure, and cannot bear to hear the wail of a hare caught by my hounds, although riding to the chase is one of my excessive pleasures.'[2]

[1] *Essais*, ii. 11: 'De la Cruauté.' [2] *Ibid.*

But Montaigne continued to hunt. To give up an enjoyment for the sake of a principle would have seemed to him mere arrogance. His pride was of another kind.

'I remember that from my tenderest years, my people said that I showed I know not what in my port and gestures the which bore witness to a vain and foolish pride. . . . I am lavish enough of cappings and bowings, notably in the summer-time, and I never receive one without returning it, whatever the quality of the saluter, unless he be a person in my pay.'[1]

It was what made Montaigne so piquant, this medley of familiar ease and ceremoniousness—his power to be as inconsistent as a woman, while he remained as virile as a man. But his pride was only skin-deep. He had not the slightest love of rule. 'I would rather be third in Périgueux than first in Paris; or, at least, as I do not want to lie, third in Paris than first in office. I am impelled to keep to the middle story, as by my fate, so likewise by my taste.'[2]

If Montaigne was not precisely humble, he was modest. Humility may be said to belong

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'

[2] *Essais*, iii. 7: 'De l'Incommodité de la Grandeur.'

to the region of morals, but modesty is rather concerned with taste—with the breeding of the mind—with good manners. Montaigne, who never disliked self-satisfaction, was always irritated by a want of modesty. And he carried this favourite virtue to its logical conclusion, to a kind of policy of masterly neglect.

'Abstinence from action is often as generous as action, but it is less evident. All the little good I am worth is of this kind. And I am made in such a fashion that I would as lief be happy as good, and would as soon owe my success to the grace of God only, as to any interference of my own.'[1] This negative attitude had its drawbacks, and he suffered for his good taste—or was it for his want of conviction?

'I encountered,' he says, 'all the inconveniences that moderation bringeth in its train. . . . I was pommelled on every hand. The Ghibelines thought me a Guelph, and the Guelphs thought me a Ghibelin.'[2]

However, as he despised both Guelphs and Ghibelines there was not much harm done. And he had rich compensations. Modesty and curiosity are amusing qualities; they make a

[1] *Essais*, iii. 10: 'De ménager sa volonté.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 12: 'De la Physionomie.'

man into a good spectator. Pythagoras, he tells us, said that 'Life was like a great crowd gathered together to see the Olympic Games. Some are exercising their bodies to win glory in the games; others are hawking their wares for profit. And there are some, by no means the worst, who seek no other gain than freedom to look how and why everything happeneth, and to be spectators of the life of other men, that thereby they may judge and govern their own.'[1]

Spectatorship must be made into a fine art; it must never be tinged with professionalism. Professionalism was Montaigne's bugbear; a specialist to him was anathema (to him, who said that he 'could not examine a child of the middle classes in its first lesson'),[2] and a 'literary man' was worse than all.

'*Mon Dieu!*' he cries, 'how I should hate to be commended for being a clever writer, and be a nobody and a fool in other characters. I would rather be a fool in all things than have so ill chosen, and so ill-used my market value.'[3]

'There is as much vanity and weakness of understanding in those who profess to be

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Essais*, ii. 37: 'De la Ressemblance des enfants aux pères.'

superior-minded, who are concerned with literary work and such offices as depend upon letters, as in any sort of people—either because more is expected of them and because ordinary faults in them are inexcusable, or because a reputation for knowledge lendeth them greater boldness in producing themselves and in giving themselves away excessively, whereby they betray their interests and fall to pieces.'[1]

No shibboleths for Montaigne. *Dilettantisme oblige* was his motto. And dilettantism must not be an insipid business. 'No wind maketh for him who hath no destined port,'[2] he once wrote, and he steered straight for knowledge —rich, haphazard knowledge of human life.

He may say what he will about his slowness, intercourse with him must have been enchanting. The talk which himself he so depreciated was probably not brilliant, but to the point; desultory, perhaps, but always pithy. And he liked plainness of speech in return. 'Whoso answereth what I say answereth well enough, and more than well, for me,'[3] he says. Some one to answer him, however, he needed, and for other purposes than those of digestion.

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'

[2] *Essais*, ii. 1: 'De l'Inconstance de nos actions.'

[3] *Essais*, iii. 8: 'L'Art de conférer.'

Whatever he may have done in his tower, he could not get on without conversation. 'The occasion, the company, the agitation of my own voice, draw forth from my mind (he says) more than I discover when I sound it and use it by myself.' But he laid down strict laws for his interlocutor. 'By how much,' he writes, 'is false speech less companionable than silence!'[1] 'One must not always say everything, for that would be folly; but what one does say must be what one thinks; otherwise it turns into evil.'[2]

'Perfect agreement in conversation is of all things the most tiresome.'

Any laying down of the law he disliked still more. 'I never make it my business,' he writes, 'to tell the world what it ought to do; there are enough meddlers already. . . . With company I associate talk—and able talk, without squeamishness.' 'As for the subject, I don't care a pin; to me all opinions are one, and victory pretty indifferent. I could fight peaceably for a whole day, if the debate were conducted with due order; it is not so much force or subtlety that I demand—it is order.'[3] 'Even among pertinent talkers, I see some

[1] *Essais*, i. 9: 'Des Menteurs.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'
[3] *Essais*, iii. 8: 'De l'Art de conférer.'

who cannot give up their course. While they . . . are actually trying to end their journey . . . they go on turning somersaults and dawdling, like men who have lost their strength. . . . Old men are the most dangerous, for they still remember past things and do not forget that they have told them. . . . And next to this in importance, Heaven grant I may never remember the offences that I have received!'[1]

Montaigne's aims in conversation were often deeper than they seemed. It is true that in general he talked for no weightier end than amusement, but his subjects were never conventional, nor did he promote conventionality in others.

'Conventionality sweeps us along with it—we abandon the substance of things. . . . Conventionality forbids us to express in words things natural and lawful, and we believe it; reason forbids us to do things unlawful and evil, and no one believes it.'[2]

'To express in words things lawful and natural'—that phrase is no bad summary of Montaigne's idea of conversation.

[1] *Essais*, i. 9: 'Des Menteurs.'

[2] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.

## III

MONTAIGNE himself believed that his life of seclusion was mainly due to his disgust with public affairs.

This was perhaps not quite so true as he believed, but there was no doubt about his disillusionment.

'The corruption of the age is made by the individual contribution of each one of us. Some give treachery, some injustice, irreligion, tyranny, avarice, or cruelty, according to their power; the feebler sort bring foolishness, vanity, idleness. And of this race am I. It seemeth to me this is the period of vain things . . . a time when evil-doing is so common that useless-doing hath become matter for praise.'[1]

The wars of religion, the senseless violence on either side, the universal rottenness, dismayed him.

In 1570, he even gave up his magistracy, his one real link with Government. He felt

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

no patriotism — he almost grew to dislike France. He was, he says, a Parisian, not a Frenchman, and he left his tower willingly for no place but Paris. There he was in 1570, superintending the printing of La Boétie's works. Thither, too, he must have travelled occasionally, now on business, now to Court, to practise his precepts concerning intercourse and to rub his mind against the minds of others.

'I must not,' he says, 'forget that I never so far mutiny against France as not to look favourably upon Paris. From my childhood upwards, she hath had my heart, and it hath happened to me, as it always doth with what is excellent, that the more beautiful towns I have seen, the more power hath this one over my affections. I love her for herself. . . . I love her tenderly — even to her moles and blemishes. I am a Frenchman only by the grace of this great city, great in inhabitants, great in prosperity, but, above all, great and incomparable in her variety and divers conveniencies . . . one of the noblest ornaments of the world. . . . As long as she endureth, I shall not want a retreat to growl in. . . .'[1]

At home he had worries which, doubtless,

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

he found it hard to elude, even in his tower. His father's death, in 1566, left a young brother of eight in his guardianship. There was another brother, Thomas — the same Huguenot to whom La Boétie gave his dying counsels—and he also had to be provided for. Montaigne presented him with the estate of Beauregard, apparently upon no easy terms, for he shifted on to Thomas's shoulders the lion's share of responsibility for his three sisters and their fortunes.

Pierre d'Ayquem's death left a mark upon his eldest son. We owe to it, also, one of his masterpieces. For it was due to his father that we have the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'[1] Some time before his death, Pierre begged his son to translate for him a Latin work given him by a valued friend: *Natural Theology, the Book of Creatures*, a confession of belief, written by Raimond Sebond, an author of uncertain nationality — some say a Spaniard —but, in any case, a great Latinist of the fifteenth century, and a known physician, teaching at Toulouse. The volume was not lost to posterity; it was read both by Pascal and by Leibnitz, and in its own age it attracted attention. It was a defence of the

[1] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

Faith. But if Pierre d'Ayquem, as has been supposed, set his son to work in the hope that Sebond's arguments would help him towards orthodoxy, he made a blunder. The great Essay that Montaigne wrote later upon the book remains as one of the strongest bulwarks of sceptical thought. Meanwhile, he performed his pious task, the beginning of which his father had seen and approved before he died. It took more than two years to finish; and it was not till 1568 that Montaigne sent the translation to press, carefully inscribed with the date, June 18th—a personal touch, for that day was the anniversary of his father's death.

The labour had been one of filial love. It was also, we feel, a refuge from the world he hated. That world he hardly looked at, even from the safe, high windows of his tower—and they were windows that, at best, could show him little of the ravaged country outside. He ignored public events. Considering his confidential prolixity about himself and his household, it is wonderful to consider the paucity and shortness of his allusions to what was going on in his day—his bare notice even of the leading personages, the most startling incidents that stirred his generation. He speaks of the wars of religion — he refers to

the execution of Horn [1] and Egmont—he just mentions the recent execution of Mary Queen of Scots.[2] And the only great man among his contemporaries upon whom he dwells with any vivid appreciation was Henri IV., his intellectual disciple, his beau-ideal, his friend, one of the few, too, who had known how to subjugate him by personal fascination.

'The which master,' says Montaigne, 'once described himself to me thus: as one who seeth as clearly as any man the dire force of accident. But as to those vicissitudes for the which there is no remedy, he immediately resolveth that he will suffer them; as to the other kind, when he hath ordered the necessary provision wherewith to meet them, and hath done all that, thanks to his vivid mind, he can do promptly, then, in calm, he awaiteth the event. . . . He seemeth to me greater and more capable in evil fortune than in good. He maketh his losses more glorious than his victories, and his mourning more splendid than his triumph.' [3]

But Montaigne was moved by no desire to

[1] *Essais*, i. 7: 'Que l'Intention juge nos actions.'

[2] *Essais*, i. 19: 'Qu'il ne faut juger de notre heur qu'après la mort.'

[3] *Essais*, iii. 10: 'De ménager sa volonté.'

admire. Indeed, he disliked all action, more especially when it assumed new shapes. He distrusted reforms as much as he distrusted popular grievances, and the Reformation was in his eyes the embodiment of human folly and pretentiousness. Innovation he resented. If he did not say, whatever is, is right, he did say whatever is not yet, is more likely to be wrong than that which is. As for political convictions, he had none.

'I regard our kings,' he said, 'with a merely civil affection ruled by law, and neither moved nor removed by private interest, for the which fact I am well pleased with myself. No more doth the righteous Popular Cause attract me, except in moderation, without fever.'[1]

His creed was purely negative, unless it be too paradoxical to say that his hatred of change amounted to a positive principle. It was his dominant idea, and one which comfortably reconciled his instinct with his moral standard.

'We take,' he wrote, 'a world already made, and bent to certain customs—we do not engender it. And whatever means we use to make it lawful that we should reform and rearrange it, we shall hardly drag it out of aid his favourite prince. He was content to

[1] *Essais*, iii. 1 : 'De l'Utile et de l'Honnête.'

its accustomed rut without smashing everything.'[1]

'It is very easy to accuse a government of imperfections, for all things mortal are full of them. It is very easy to breed in a people the scorn of its ancient observances. No man hath ever undertaken such a task without achieving it. But as for the establishment of a better state in the place of that which hath been ruined, why, truly, in this enterprise many adventurers have foundered.'[2]

'The laws have saved me a great deal of trouble; they have chosen my party and have given me a master. Every other kind of superiority and obligation must be restricted and relative, compared to theirs. Our wills and desires make their own laws; our actions have to accept those commanded by State ordinance.'[3]

'For whoso meddleth with choosing and changing, usurpeth authority to judge, and must profess to see the faults in that which he abolisheth and the good of that which he introduceth. This common consideration hath given me a firmer seat, and held my bold

[1] *Essais*, iii. 19: 'De la Vanité.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'
[3] *Essais*, iii. 1: 'De l'Utile et de l'Honnête.

youth on the curb, that I might not load my shoulders with so heavy a burden as to make myself answerable for such an all-important branch of knowledge, and that I might not dare to do in this what my sane judgment would not allow me to venture in the easiest sciences the which I have been taught—those in which a rash judgment doth no harm. It seemeth to me very baneful to wish to submit immutable public laws and public observance to the instabilities of private fancy. Private judgment hath only private jurisdiction. . . . But all that other crowd, whither doth it wander? Under what flag doth it rush for shelter? It happeneth with the remedies of these men as it doth with other futile, ill-applied medicines — the humours that they desired to purge in us, they do but heat.' . . . 'For, in truth, in these last necessities, where there is nothing to be done, it were perchance wiser to bow the head and somewhat bend before the blow, than to hurl aside the idea of yielding any jot and so give violence its chance of trampling all under foot.'[1]

'Is it not bad economy to advance so many well-known and proven vices in order to fight

[1] *Essais*, i. 23: 'De la coutume et de ne changer aisément une loi reçue.'

errors the which are dubious and debatable? Is there a worse kind of vice than that which shocketh our own conscience and knowledge?'[1]

Yet 'whatsoever we already know and enjoy, we feel that it doth not satisfy us, and we go gaping after things unknown and still to be. . . . For that the things present do not satisfy us, is not to my mind because they have not wherewithal to do so, but because we take hold of them with a hand that is diseased and ill-controlled.'[2]

Although Montaigne neglected his country, that country took pains to seek him out. In 1574, we find him stirring. The Duc de Montpensier sent him upon a mission from the Royalist camp to the Parlement of Bordeaux; he made a stay in Paris, and received the Order of St. Michael—no great distinction, perhaps, since Guise had made it common, but still a tribute to a provincial magistrate who was not important in the State and was not yet known as a writer. Fresh honours came upon him. After Henri III.'s accession in 1576, he was made Gentleman of the Bedchamber, an office not needfully implying residence at Court, but

[1] *Essais*, i. 23: 'De la coutume et de ne changer aisément une loi reçue.'

[2] *Essais*, i. 53: 'D'un mot de César.'

giving convenient access to the King. And in 1577, the same post was given him by Henri de Navarre. This last appointment came to him as a surprise; he had no idea that he was to receive it till the letter conferring it was in his hands. He had once been instrumental in reconciling Navarre with Guise—he had negotiated between the Duc de Montpensier and the Bordeaux *Parlement* —he had helped a nobleman to what he wanted from Chancellor L'Hôpital: these diplomatic achievements found their reward.

It was between 1571 and 1588 that he wrote his *Essays* — those masterpieces of colossal ease, those desultory good-natured fragments of a complete and formidable philosophy. We know how he came to write them. Habit was too strong for him; he had grown unwilling to leave his library, and yet his solitude had become irksome. 'It was,' he says, 'a melancholy humour, and so a humour very adverse to my nature, one produced by the depression of that solitude in which, for some years, I had wrapped myself, the which first put into my head the notion that I should meddle with the art of writing. And then, for that I found my mind destitute and entirely empty of other matter, I presented

myself to myself for argument and for subject.'[1]

He knew no other man so well. He had indeed observed himself as closely and impersonally as a naturalist observes a moth, and he enjoyed recording his observations. But he was quite without the literary man's desire to paint a picture of himself; he had not the susceptibilities of what we now call the artist's temperament — perhaps his portrait is the truer for that. And the portrait, in its turn, affected him.

'I have no more made my book than my book hath made me,' he says.[2] The *Essays* may, indeed, have helped him to avoid the foibles he chronicled. The omission of one emotional phrase of his: 'Oh for a friend!' which stands in the first edition, but is left out of the last, is by no means without significance. The first complete edition was published in 1588, but the first two Books had already appeared in 1580, the third being added later. And this third is of especial interest; it bears the marks of his experience; it is often coloured by the severe illness from which he suffered in 1580, and from which he wrung

[1] *Essais*, ii. 8: 'De l'Affection des pères aux enfants,'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 18: 'Du Démentir,'

a new philosophy—the philosophy of physical endurance. There was yet another, a last edition, which only appeared in 1595, three years after his death.

Thus the *Essays* took him seventeen years of reading, registering, writing, in his tower: of writing and rewriting, for that supreme ease was not won without effort; his manuscript is scored with corrections.

During these seventeen years, other things were happening to Montaigne. Was it now, was it earlier, that he gained that experience of military life of which there is evidence in his pages? He may not have fought—he must have known a soldier's existence; but when this was remains in the vague. Whatever the period, it could have been but a brief one, a parenthesis in his long years of seclusion, maybe a passing phase of his youth. The desire for the excitement of battle found no place in Montaigne's nature. On the other hand, he felt strongly the desire for the stir of travel. It was characteristic that the spirit of adventure in him should take a merely intellectual form—that of curiosity—and his appetite grew the keener for being so long unsatisfied. But the moment came. His serious illness, in 1580, provided him with a

pretext. He would try the Baths of Lucca, and his journey thither would serve as a motive for protracted wanderings.

Montaigne was a born traveller, in mind, in body, in tastes; casual, observant, and cosmopolitan. His hatred of any kind of provincialism made him set out in the true travelling spirit.

'I am ashamed,' he says, 'to see our countrymen tipsy with that silliest kind of conceit—a scare concerning forms that are the contrary of their own. They seem to be out of their element directly they are out of their village. Wherever they go, they stick to their habits and abominate foreign ways. If they find a Frenchman in Hungary, they hold high festival over the adventure; in an instant they cling together, they tie themselves up in a knot, they condemn all the barbarous manners and customs they come across—for why should they not be called barbarous since they are not French? Most of them like going forth for the sake of coming back; they travel tightly buttoned, and covered up with a taciturn incommunicable prudence, defending themselves against the contagion of an unknown climate. . . . I, on the contrary, set out very sick of our

fashions, not to look for Gascons in Sicily—I have left enough of them at home—I rather seek for Greeks and for Persians.'[1]

'Intercourse with other men, and seeing foreign countries, is wonderfully good, and for this reason: not only to bring home in one's head the exact number of the steps at Santa Rotunda, or a computation of the richness of Santa Lucia's linen; or, like some others, to know by how much the face of Nero found (on a coin) in some old ruin near by, is longer or broader than that on another medal; but to bring home the humours of nations and their fashions, and to rub . . . our brains against the brains of other men. From its tenderest years onwards, I should like a child to be taken abroad.'[2]

Anything better than the 'cackle of a burgh.' 'Thou seest nothing,' he tells the average man, 'but the order and the government of this little cave where thou lodgest. Thou proclaimest but a municipal law: thou knowest not which is the universal.'[3]

So Montaigne departed, determined to be all things to all foreigners. We have a vivid

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'
[2] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
[3] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

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picture of his start. Greatly as he had wished it, and little though he felt at leaving his family, when the moment came he was invaded by the melancholy of departure. He did not weep, he says, but he was filled with depression, as 'with sad countenance' he put his foot in the stirrup, dressed, doubtless, in his favourite black or white. The weather was warm, but his long 'coat of no fashion trimmed with rough hair,' and the two caps that he wore one over the other, cannot have been far off, for he was a chilly person, and always provided against the cold. With him went his younger brother, Bertrand, Sieur de Mattecoulon, two nobles and his secretary, to whom must be added the Sieur d'Étissac, who met them later on their way—a son, he was, of a lady to whom Montaigne dedicated an essay.

It was June, 1580, when they set out, it was November, 1581, when they returned. They set out for nowhere, except that at some indefinite date they were to reach the Baths of Lucca. For it was one of Montaigne's stipulations that he was to be bound neither by time nor place. If some traveller's fancy took him, if he felt a sudden wish to visit or revisit a spot, he should, he announced, obey his whim, going and coming at his own

FRONTISPIECE OF MONTAINE'S "VOYAGE EN ITALIE."
*Engraved by Saint Aubin.*

season, and the rest might follow him, or not, as they would.

He began with France, first going to Paris, and then to visit the Royalist camp at La Fère. This northern town was being besieged by the great Matignon, and here Montaigne lingered about six weeks. Here it was, say some, that he presented his *Essays* to Henri III. They contained, he told the complimenting King, nothing but discourses concerning his own life. Here, too, he watched the death of Grammont, the husband of La belle Corisande, Diane d'Andouins, that mistress of Henri de Navarre to whom Montaigne had dedicated the early love-sonnets of La Boétie.

At Plombières he visited Andelot—the one survivor of the great Coligny trio: his face, he says, was still blanched from the shock of the Admiral's murder, eight years before. And so he reached Switzerland, came to Basel, where he saw Hotman, the famous pamphleteer, and went on through Germany and the Tyrol towards the South. Unlike most Epicurean hermits, Montaigne had given up his well-loved habits from the outset. He exacted nothing from his landlords but cleanliness, and decent beds and hangings, with tolerable supplies of wine and food—crayfish if

possible. One of the few complaints that he vented was the absence of crayfish in Rovere. 'As to food,' writes his secretary, 'we had here no crayfish, which thing M. de Montaigne found very strange, seeing that ever since we left Plombières, a distance of two hundred leagues, this dish had been put before us at every meal.'[1]

As to company, we know that he avoided that of his fellow-countrymen, and, above the rest, he shunned those who 'talked discomforts,' to his mind the dullest talk of all. Nothing annoyed him more than to be guilty of unwittingly offending local feelings, as when, rather naturally, in Augsburg, he held a handkerchief to his nose, and heard that his gesture had been noticed by the burghers. He liked, as far as possible, to become one of the men among whom he was living, and, perhaps to make up for the handkerchief, he hastened to buy a new fur cap of the Augsburg fashion, that he might look like an Augsburg citizen. In Italy he danced at a ball in order not to be conspicuous. And, wherever he stayed, he left behind him, as was the custom among well-born lodgers, his coat-of-

[1] *The Journal of Montaigne's Travels*, edited by W. G. Waters, vol. i. p. 187.

arms finely emblazoned, to be hung up as a tribute to his landlord.

Over mountain passes, through smiling valleys, the party rode on to Innsbruck—with never a mention of Nature, excepting topographical allusions, or references, of which there are plenty, to altitudes and produce, to the bareness or fertility of the land. Montaigne noted any great building, any curiosity, any fragment of antiquity; he noted the ugliness of the German women; he took what he found in the way of people, he hobnobbed indifferently with the inmates of taverns, or palaces; he lingered in hovels, he dined with prelates; he conversed with priests and heretical ministers; he would have liked to converse with princes, but at Innsbruck the Archduke refused to receive him because he was a Frenchman—his only grievance on the trip—and he had to put up with the Archduchess, whom he entertained at dinner. And so he crossed the frontier into Italy. Again no mention of its beauties, only frequent descriptions of the grottos, and waterworks, and ingenuities of the princely villas that he saw on his road. He was struck with the differences from Germany; with the way in which, outside the walls of a city, a crowd of 'Guides'

would ride out to meet him, each recommending his inn, and all together screaming and gesticulating till they entered the town, where they fell silent, in fear, most likely, of the police. Montaigne quizzed them—they greatly amused him, as things still amuse tourists in Italy to-day. He consorted with celebrities. At Florence, he dined with the Duke and Bianca Capella; at Venice, Veronica Franca, that most notorious, most Titianesque of ladies, sent him her little effort in literature, the volume of her *Lettere diverse*. At Ferrara, he visited Tasso in his pathetic confinement in a monastery. And at last he came to Rome—Rome, to him ever the centre of the world. When he got there, it was strangely familiar to him.

'The State,' he says, 'of that ancient Rome, free, righteous, and flourishing (for I love neither its birth nor its old age), interests, impassions me. However many times I might see the lie of its streets, of its houses, or those ruins whose bases are hid as deep as the antipodes, I should never be weary of them. Is it by nature, or is it some error of fancy that the sight of places the which we know to have been haunted and inhabited by persons of glorious memory moves us in some strange

fashion, more than when we hear the story of their deeds, or read their writings? . . . I turn these great names over and over upon my tongue, and make them resound in my ears.'[1]

This is the most emotional reference that Montaigne made to his travels. He says in prose what Joachim Du Bellay said in poetry, and he was invaded with the same overpowering sense of a past which dwarfs and dulls the present. The Rome of the Renaissance did not please him. 'He declared that the buildings of this bastard Rome, which were now being joined on to the ancient masonry . . . reminded him exactly of the nests the martins and crows were building in the roofs and on the walls of the French churches which the Huguenots had destroyed.'[2]

Yet this despised present was alive enough to him. Cardinals fetched him in their coaches and showed him the sights. He soon, however, found his way about alone. He had at first engaged a Frenchman as guide, but 'this fellow took himself off in some ridiculous fit of ill-humour, whereupon M. de Montaigne prided himself on mastering by his own efforts

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

[2] *The Journal of Montaigne's Travels*, edited by W. G. Waters, vol. ii. p. 97.

the arts of a guide. In the evening, he would study certain books and maps, and next day repair to the spot . . . so that in a few days he could have shown his guide the way.'[1]

He was admitted to the Vatican Library, and delighted in the editions of Virgil, Plutarch, and Seneca that he found there, noting, also, that the handwriting of St. Thomas Aquinas was even worse than his own. Everything was food for his curiosity. 'There were sermons to be listened to at all seasons, or disputes in theology'; or else he sought 'diversion' with notorious ladies, for no other reason than the 'privilege of simple conversation (. . . desiring to hear them talk, and to take part in their play of wit)'; but this amusement he had to give up on the ground of economy, because the ladies 'charged' so 'extortionately.' He was fond of life in streets and churches. He witnessed a miracle of exorcism in 'a small chapel' that he chanced to enter. He saw the races in the Corso, and got a seat in the best stand for three crowns. He was present at the Mass at Christmas in St. Peter's, and heard legends of poison in the Pyx. The chatter of the attendant prelates

[1] *The Journal of Montaigne's Travels*, edited by W. G. Waters, vol. ii. p. 95.

shocked him—as much as he could be shocked. He witnessed a great Papal procession, and he had audience of Pope Gregory XIII., who graciously extended his scarlet shoe, with its white cross, slightly upwards, so that Montaigne might reach it more easily.

The action might be taken symbolically. The Vatican was prepared to stretch a point, and make things easy for Montaigne. Before he had done with Rome, the first two Books of his *Essays* were found in his trunk, and carried off to the Censor, and he himself was summoned before a council of prelates. When the volume was sent back to him he found it 'expurgated and brought into harmony with the opinions of the monkish doctors. The Maestro del Sacro Palazzo could only pronounce judgment on it from the report of a certain French monk, for he himself was ignorant of our language; but he was so fully satisfied with the explanation I gave him of all those passages to which exception had been taken by the Frenchman, that he left to me the task of correcting, according to my conscience, everything which might appear wanting in good taste.'[1]

[1] *The Journal of Montaigne's Travels*, edited by W. G. Waters, vol. ii. p. 139.

The Maestro's confidence was large, and Montaigne did not work his conscience very hard on the subject. He was accused of attributing everything to fortune; of mentioning the poetry of Bèze, the heretic; of praising Julian the Apostate; of saying (strange sin) that a man must be purged from vice before he prayed; of stating that 'it is cruelty to inflict . . . more pain than is necessary to kill men,' and that 'children should be brought up to examine all sides of a question.' Montaigne characteristically got off by averring that these were only his private opinions and not his opinions as a Catholic. He was asked to amend the dubious points in his next edition, and he promised to do so. But the 'Maestro, who was a man of parts, completely exonerated me, and was anxious to let me see that he set small value on these emendations.' When the new edition appeared they were not there, and all was the same as before.

Montaigne seems, indeed, to have been very popular in Rome. He found no difficulty in gaining the one honour which he really cared to have, and which he sought, as he tells us, 'with all his five natural senses.' This was the citizenship of Rome, which had to be conferred by a Papal Bull. Why he thus

sought a prize so useless to him it is difficult to say. Did he perhaps like to practise his Plutarch, and fancy himself a Roman citizen of ancient days? Whatever his motive, he got what he wanted. The Pope's major-domo helped him, the right powers were approached, and, before he departed, he had the distinction that he coveted.

Montaigne left Rome with regret; his only complaint was that he met too many Frenchmen there. But the season for the Baths of Lucca had come, and he set out to take his cure. On the way he stopped at Lǫreto, to visit its great shrine and to deposit within its walls three silver statues—of himself, of his wife, and of Lénor. But once at the Baths, no more sight-seeing for him; he gave himself up to the business in hand—to careful, clinical observation of the results of the waters, and much note-taking about the merits of his lodgings. And he participated in the life going on around him—the life of a fashionable watering-place—deliberately, for purposes of hygiene. 'He who doth not bring spirits enough to enjoy the company he findeth there . . . without doubt loseth the best and surest part of their effect.'[1]

[1] *Essais*, ii. 37: 'De la Ressemblance des enfants aux pères.'

So Montaigne even went the length of giving a ball to the people of the town. He was anxious, he said, to give the first of the season. It began in the Piazza and ended in the Palazzo Buonvisi. There were a hundred guests. He engaged five pipers, and bought 'nineteen prizes for the ladies' (in this case for the peasant ladies—the richer people only took part in the dancing), and he hung up his prizes in a richly decked hoop. There were bombazine aprons and netted head-dresses and pearl necklaces. 'I went about,' adds this connoisseur of the graces, 'glancing now at this damsel and now at that, never failing to allow due credit for beauty and charm.' He would not permit a 'damsel' who 'was not over well-favoured' to receive a prize at all. However, he was kinder at the banquet which followed; for 'I found,' he writes, 'a place at table for Divizia, a poor peasant woman who lives about two miles from the Baths, unmarried, and with no other support than her handiwork. She is ugly, about thirty-seven years of age, with a swollen throat, and unable either to read or write.'[1] But Divizia had had an uncle who constantly read aloud Ariosto

[1] *The Journal of Montaigne's Travels*, edited by W. G. Waters, vol. iii. p. 72-3.

and others of the poets'; and, finding 'a natural delight in poetry,' she had taken to making verses herself. She recited some now, in her host's honour, and Montaigne, good humouredly content with this rather unattractive Muse, felt his ball to have been a great success.

He made two stays at the Baths, although he had no great belief in getting cured, and, following no rules but his own, chose to take the waters as he thought best. It was towards the end of his second visit, on September 7th, 1581, that he received a letter which changed his prospects. It came from Bordeaux, and it told him that, a month before, he had been elected mayor of that city. The open foe of responsibility, he now put his precepts in practice, and his first answer was that he 'wished to be excused.' Five days later he was on his way to Rome, but when he got there he found a letter from the Bordeaux authorities urging his return. He obeyed, leaving his brother and Étissac behind him, and on October 1st, he started homewards by way of Mont Cenis, now on horseback, now carried in a litter. The journey took him two months, and it was not till November 30th, that he arrived at Montaigne.

He was not to be allowed to rest there. Shortly before he reached home, the king himself had written ordering him to accept the appointment if he did not wish to incur His Majesty's displeasure. There was nothing for it but to yield, and Montaigne the philosopher became Montaigne the mayor.

It must have consoled him that his fathers had held the office before him. His election was generally popular. His predecessor, the great Maréchal de Biron, a vehement man, none too judicious, had fallen out with king and people, and the new mayor's moderation was a relief. So great, indeed, was his success that, at the end of his two-years tenure of office he was re-elected, and was thus mayor for four years, from 1581 to 1585.

But the story of Montaigne's mayoralty makes perhaps the dullest chapter of his life. He was just the official he would lead us to expect, performing all the duties required of him and something more, but doing nothing signal or heroic. His first and his last acts were in defence of the weak and helpless: his first, an attempt to amend the treatment of the foundling children neglected by their proper guardians, the Jesuits; his last, to protest against the imprisonment of women

and children. And he lightened the miseries of the poor by refusing to allow the rich to be exempt from taxation—by trying, too, to make the religious houses take their part, and every parish bear its own burdens. Nor did he want for other activities. He busied himself with the reconstruction of a light-house where the Gironde meets the sea; he did his best to promote free navigation; he was concerned with education, and improved the College of the Jesuits, as well as his own old school, the Collège de Guienne. With his great dislike of making an effect, he was more prone to underrate his deeds than otherwise. When he first came home, he warned the electors of his failings; he was 'without memory, without vigilance, without experience, and without vigour; but also without hatred, without ambition, without avarice, and without violence.' 'He might,' he told them, 'lend himself to the public, but give himself he would not, and could not.'[1] Yet he probably did more by courage and serenity than others achieve by qualities more showy.

During his first two years he was present at the opening of a new Court of Justice—the Court of Guienne—instituted to negotiate

[1] *Montaigne*: Dowden.

between the hostile factions in the province. It was held at Bordeaux, although its members were drawn from elsewhere, and the most interesting thing about it is that one of its members, De Thou (the grandson of l'Hôpital), who was to be a famous historian, and was then a young man of twenty-one, gives us his impression of Montaigne: 'a man,' he calls him, 'of frank and open nature, hostile to all constraint, one who had entered into no cabal, well versed, moreover, in our affairs, chiefly in those of Guienne, his native province.'

Meanwhile, the country was disturbed from other causes than those arising from the wars. The domestic affairs of Henri de Navarre were setting the south of France by the ears. In 1583, Henri III. expelled his sister, Marguerite de Navarre, from Paris, and her husband, who had also cast her out, saw that he would have once more to receive her. In vengeance on the king, who had reduced him to this disagreeable necessity, he seized the town of Mont-de-Marsan and held it. It was policy to stand well with Montaigne, the mayor of the chief town in Guienne, and he bade Du Plessis Mornay write him a series of letters seeking to win his suffrage. Montaigne, in a tight place, between this prince

and Matignon, the governor of the province and thus the representative of the Crown, got out of the difficulty by evasion: he only corresponded with Matignon, he did not meet him; and the next year, 1584, events themselves came to his aid. Henri III.'s brother, the Duc d'Anjou, who stood next to the French throne, died, and his cousin, Navarre, became the heir. Navarre had to change his tactics, and, from the first, Montaigne attached himself to him, without weakening his allegiance to the king.

The alliance was cemented in 1584. Montaigne had been attempting to arrange matters between Matignon and the King of Navarre; that sovereign was at no great distance from the château of Montaigne, and, inspired no doubt by curiosity, he invited himself to stay there with forty followers. He remained for two days, and Montaigne made for him the only sacrifice of his personal ease that we can discover in his life—he gave him his own bed to sleep in. The visit was a diplomatic victory, for all difficulties were satisfactorily settled, and Montaigne ended it by providing Henri with two days' hunting in the neighbourhood. The philosopher was no doubt fascinated by the prince. Three years later, after

the battle of Coutras, we find him again a guest at the château.

The feuds of the Ligue—that combination of Guise and the Catholic nobles against the throne—were harder to deal with. There came a time, not long after, when Bordeaux was threatened both by the Ligueurs and the Huguenots. Montaigne kept watch one whole night in the port, because his fears had been aroused by the presence there of an armed vessel. But, with Matignon's help, he warded off the peril.

The close of his term of office was not a glorious one. At the end of his time the plague broke out in the city, and, with a good sense which was rather ignominious, Montaigne fled outside its walls and asked to tender his resignation to Matignon at a safe distance from the town. Bordeaux itself wished to re-elect him, but he had decided to retire, and Matignon was chosen as his successor. The ex-mayor withdrew to his tower, and for two or three years we hear little of him.

One friendship, made while he was mayor, meant much to him. It was during this time that he learned to know Francis Bacon's brother, Anthony, who spent twelve years in

France, and a great part of them at Bordeaux. Here he constantly stayed between 1583 and 1591, and here he became intimate with Montaigne. After he returned to England, they corresponded till Montaigne's death. No doubt Francis Bacon often saw the letters from France and listened to his brother's stories of their writer—of what he said, and how he lived. Montaigne left him other bequests than that word 'Essays,' which he had made so glorious.

Anthony Bacon's letters were probably events to Montaigne. Another pleasure came to him in these later days: a great wish of his was fulfilled. He had long desired a disciple —a friend of his intellect—and such a one appeared. This was Pierre Charron, a sceptical ecclesiastic of pleasant countenance and gay, easy-going manners, an ardent admirer of Montaigne, and inspired with a keen wish to make his personal acquaintance. In 1586, he came to stay in the château. His admiration warmed Montaigne's heart, his companionship stimulated him; and, what is more, Charron's learning, more methodical than that of Montaigne, helped him towards some ordering of his thoughts. It may well be that Charron's influence went for some-

thing in the writing of the Third Book of the *Essays*.

This was finished by 1588, and Montaigne went to Paris to superintend the publication of the first edition. On this journey it was that the robbers, at least fifteen in number, took him prisoner, and then, charmed by his countenance, set him free. He reached Paris safely, but probably he did not enjoy it long. Most historians agree that this must have been the time that he had the dangerous illness mentioned by one who knew him, the poet, Pierre de Brach. 'He conquered death by contemning it,' said this friend; but, whatever the remedy, he recovered.

He had come to a world distraught by revolution. Paris was torn by the struggle between the King and the Ligue, and it was during Montaigne's sojourn that the crisis supervened, and the King left Paris to Guise and his partisans. Montaigne was loyal to the Crown and followed Henri out of the city, and when, soon upon this, he returned, he was clapped by the Ligueurs into the Bastille. It was discovered that this act of violence was mere retaliation—a form of revenge for Henri's imprisonment of a Normandy gentleman—and after a few hours' confinement (the shortest

confinement perhaps on record) he was released by express order of Catherine de' Medici —the fitting deliverer of such a captive. This seems to be the only occasion on which the two great opportunists came into direct relation with one another, and it bore no fruit of subsequent intercourse. Nor did it affect Montaigne otherwise. But the episode was his nearest approach to martyrdom, and its brevity is characteristic.

The next year still found him away from home and following the movements of the Court. He was present at the fateful opening of the États de Blois; we know that he talked to De Thou there, and to the royal geographer, Laval; we know, too, that he and the poet, Étienne Pasquier, had a conversation about the *Essays*. Pasquier cavilled at the Gasconisms he found in them; critic-like, he was sure he had made an impression upon the author. But when the edition of 1595 appeared, not a word that he questioned had been changed. Montaigne, however, did not stay on at Blois; he was not there for the final catastrophe. The news of Henri's murder of Guise reached him at Montaigne; so did the tidings, not long after, of the assassination of the King.

That event largely altered Montaigne's prospects, for it put his friend, Navarre, upon the throne. It was yet three years before he established his position and France formally acknowledged him as Henri IV. ; but in point of fact, he was king from the first moment.

Had Montaigne lived long into his reign, his influence would have left strong traces. As it was, in the three years before his death, he was not without effect upon the royal counsels.

'I have,' he wrote to him in 1590, 'always beheld in you this same dignity of fortune the which you have reached ; and you may remember that even when I had to confess as much to my *curé*, I did not for a moment leave off considering your successes with approval. Nowadays when I have more reason and more liberty I embrace your triumphs with a complete affection.'

And later in the same year he makes bold to reprove him :

'I should have wished that the private gains of the soldiers of your army, and the need to content them had not deprived you in this capital city of a noble name for having, in the midst of victory, treated your mutinous subjects with greater indul-

gence than is used by their protectors. And would that, instead of an ill-gotten, transitory reputation, you had shown that they were yours by your truly royal, fatherly protection. To conduct such affairs as you have in hand, you must use means that are out of the common. . . . There was a great conqueror of the past who was wont to boast that he had given to the foes whom he had conquered as much cause to love him as to his friends.'

The king would never have been offended with anything that Montaigne said. A strong personal affection had grown up between them. 'I take it as a singular favour that His Majesty hath deigned to let me feel that he would care to see me'—thus he wrote when he had, too late, received a summons to meet the king at Tours—'A futile person I am, indeed, yet his, rather by affection than by duty.'

And the affection was wholly disinterested. When Henri wrote to him asking what reward he would like for his services, Montaigne's reply was that he had all that he wanted, and wished for nothing but the payment of such expenses as might leave him out of pocket when he should be in attendance upon the king. And the king, who understood him,

acquiesced, and only repaid him with his confidence.

What a wonderful reign it would have been had Henri IV. had Montaigne for Prime Minister. Many things would have happened that did happen—some would not have been allowed to happen—considerably more would have been added. And how richly these two past-masters in *savoir-faire* would have entertained one another!

MARIE JARS DE GOURNAY.

*From the frontispiece chosen by herself for her book "Advis et Préseus" in the edition of 1641. (Bibliothèque Nationale.)*

*(From a photograph by M. Giraudon.)*

## IV

It was typical of Montaigne's life that perhaps its most amusing episode should have been kept for the last. His friendship with Mademoiselle Marie le Jars de Gournay was the spice at the close of the feast: the first friendship in the modern spirit between an admiring young woman and a man of letters who likes to be admired. Admiration seems, indeed, too mild a word for Marie de Gournay's sentiment: it was nearer hero-worship. And Montaigne, the scorner of women, would not have been a man had he not enjoyed it. Who can tell what would have happened had he met her earlier in life? His very contempt of her sex was based upon his feeling of what women might be if they could but cultivate the mind. When he finally met one who was intellectual, he gave her companionship upon equal terms. And there were no looks to allure him. Like La Boétie, she was rather ugly than otherwise, with a round face and prominent eyes. In-

deed, in later years, when some baseless scandal was spread abroad concerning her, it was said that her best defence would be to show herself. There must have been a rare force of mind, distinction, a vivid intelligence, in the woman who so attracted Montaigne. She did not only respond, she contributed. Yet the intellect was not the only element in her relations with him ; they were Platonic, but they were personal. He was an elderly man, she was young and she was feminine ; he was an author, she a reader ; there was flattery in her attitude, and he was getting jaded—perhaps in need of flattery. There are too many obvious reasons for their friendship to make it any sure test of Montaigne's standards.

And, strange to say, her feeling was for the author more than for the man. She had an inborn faculty for letters which had inspired her lonely life long before she knew him. She was born in 1565, thirty-two years after Michel de Montaigne, and she had lived in the compulsory solitude of the family château in Picardy, thrown back upon her own resources. She quickly developed a taste —a passionate taste—for learning ; it served her instead of human intercourse, for of this she had none. Her father died early in her

life. Her mother, an eccentric lady of rank, had no sympathy with her daughter, and the greatest contempt for every branch of knowledge. Marie had a remarkable will as well as a remarkable brain. For her the moral and intellectual became one in her arduous scheme of discipline. She had no teachers—she taught herself. By means of ponderous translations she mastered Latin enough, in after days, to translate Virgil; she studied Greek; she pored over grammar; she steeped herself in criticism and poetry. She also absorbed herself in chemistry and in alchemy, over which, later on, she was rash enough to spend large sums. She had, she tells us, 'a boiling-hot temper'; she did not easily forget an injury; she was impetuous; she had a trenchant wit; her mind was not inclined to piety. To her it seemed presumptuous that a mortal should dare to adore the Deity.

Le fini l'infini? L'ouvrage son Auteur?
Un atome, un néant, l'unique Créateur?[1]

Thus she questioned. And this sixteenth-century Mary Wollstonecraft was full of theories about the heart. Unlike the more modern woman, she proclaimed that she had no need of the love that is ordinarily given

[1] *Peinture des Mœurs*: Mademoiselle de Gournay.

to her sex; she pleaded for a spiritualised passion. When Montaigne arrived, he only embodied a long-cherished idea. It was in 1583, or 1584, that she came across the first two Books of the *Essays*. She read with such excitement that her relations had to administer hellebore as a sedative to her nerves; it was only her resolve to cultivate calm like Montaigne that had power to tranquillise her. She had, she tells us, but one desire—she 'began to wish to know the author more than anything else in the world.' Two or three years after, she heard a rumour of his death, 'from the which she suffered an extreme sorrow, for it seemed to her that all the glory and happiness and riches of her soul were mown down like grass by the loss of the companionship and converse she had promised herself to hold with his mind.' The report was contradicted—she breathed again. Not long after, she came to Paris with her mother; he was there. She took her chance; she sent a letter 'to salute him,' and he also lost no time, but came the next day to see her. The effect was instantaneous: he felt like a father towards her; he hailed her as his 'adopted daughter,' 'the which affection she received with the more plaudits

for that she was astonished at the predestined sympathy between their geniuses, she having in her heart, after first reading his book, foretold just such a friendship upon his side, both because of the difference in their ages and the outlook of their souls upon life and morals.'

This rather high-flown, practical Egeria, when she got what she wanted made the most of it. It is easy to think her overstrained and pompous. If no charm of presence or of nature transmits itself from her to us through the centuries, so much the more noteworthy is her survival as a memorable person, apart from her master. For with her strong character, she wrested content from adverse circumstances and eventually won happiness. It was something like a miracle to emerge from her straitened solitude to find Montaigne; to discover that her dream of knowing him had come true beyond her fondest imaginations; to realise that her solitude was broken, and broken by such a companion. She does not inspire sentiment in posterity, and yet there is something like pathos in the strangely sudden change in her existence, in the brevity of her brilliant fortune. She lost no day of her happiness, for she spent eight or nine months in

Montaigne's company at Paris, discussing with him all the thoughts and subjects over which she had brooded in her seclusion; and, after that, he paid her a three months' visit in the château in Picardy. How the mother regarded her daughter's literary romance, how she behaved, remains unknown. Mademoiselle seems to have taken her own way, like the most modern of young women.

And, like other modern young women of twenty-four, she wrote a novel, a very dull one, the story of a Persian Princess. It was written at Montaigne's instigation. One day he and she had been reading Plutarch together; they had been discussing tales of tragic love and the fatal results of passion. Montaigne advised her to write a romance—he no doubt often revived the subject upon their daily walks about the countryside. And when he had gone, she consoled herself by obeying his suggestion. She set to work with a rather drastic energy, and, the manuscript once finished, she sent it off by express messenger to Gascony. It was bulky, and it was called *Le Proumenoir de M. de Montaigne*, in memory of the occasions that inspired it; but though M. de Montaigne may have felt flattered, he can hardly have felt amused. There remains

no record to tell us whether or no he regretted his advice.

Her aphorisms were more interesting than her long works. A few of these adages survive, strongly flavoured with Montaigne, yet bold and sufficiently her own to show why her mind suited his. 'A good man,' she said, 'will sometimes, may often, forgive a folly; a fool will not forgive wisdom.'

'The soul is only useful to the common herd as salt is useful to the pig—to keep it from corruption.'

'Whoever should take from man the virtues that he practiseth by compulsion, by interest, or by chance and mere inadvertence, will place him nearer to the animals than I dare confess.'

'When I consider the filthy stains, the nothingness of men, I sometimes long to believe that Heaven's design was to found each of our great towns for ten souls only, and that all the rest were created to serve as candles to these few and as material for their divers virtues.'

'Whoso doth not perceive his virtues will never perceive his vices.'

'The sun, very great though it be, seemeth to enter whole into a mere drop of water, and man appeareth likewise to enter whole

into one action, and that often the least brilliant of his life.'

She was a critic of style, as well as of conduct. Her own taste, like that of her master, made her prefer the simple and sincere. She instinctively disliked all pretension. '*Mon Dieu*,' she wrote of some inferior authors, 'what glory and what diadems! How much looking for Palestine a hundred miles the other side of Jordan!'

These sayings belong to a later period of Mademoiselle de Gournay's existence, but the woman who could think and express herself thus saliently was no unworthy companion for Montaigne. Their main subject of conversation, whether upon their strolls or at home, was not, however, Mademoiselle de Gournay or her writing. It was Montaigne, and Montaigne's *Essays*. She offered criticisms—Montaigne delighted in them. His feeling for her increased till it almost amounted to a passion. 'I have,' he says in one of the *Essays*,[1] 'taken pleasure in proclaiming in various places the hopes that I entertain of Marie de Gournay le Jars, my adopted daughter, surely loved by me with much more than a fatherly love, and treasured in my lonely

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17 : 'De la Présomption.'

retreat as one of the most precious parts of my own being. I look to no one but to her now in the world. If youth can give any presage, this soul of hers will one day be capable of the noblest things. The criticisms that she made of my first *Essays*—she a woman, so young, so solitary in her country-side, and living in such an age—the devotion that she pledged me merely on the good opinion that she formed of me long before she saw me, are incidents well worthy of meditation.'

It was thus that Marie de Gournay, the literary confidante of Montaigne, the recipient of his wishes about the *Essays*, of his notes or verbal injunctions concerning changes and amendments, became his editor after his death. Of this calamity she only heard through a friend, some eight months after it had happened. It would have plunged her in despair had she not had her great task to sustain her. It was no easy one. Her material, it is true, was within reach. She had the manuscript of the edition of 1588, which Madame de Montaigne had put into the hands of Montaigne's friend, Pierre de Brach, who, in his turn, gave it to Mademoiselle de Gournay. And there were

scholars enough if she wanted guidance. But she was taking a bold step ; she was, perhaps, the first woman editor, in an age when editing was a fine art. And she, who alone knew the many alterations that Montaigne had intended to make, found herself confronted with no mean difficulties. She showed courage and patience, she showed great diligence. She often had to work upon rough notes and indications, to recall words, to decide between variants—she laboriously translated all Montaigne's classical quotations—and this at a time when her natural vigour was dulled by her sorrow. 'I with him, and I without him,' she said, 'are two absolutely different beings.' But she did not rest until she had done ; the edition appeared in 1595. It was only then that she felt free to seek repose. And she found it at the château of Montaigne, the home that she had never seen in her master's lifetime, whither she now journeyed to make acquaintance with his widow and his daughter. It is to the credit of all three women that they became close friends, and that Mademoiselle de Gournay, who was addicted to long visits, stayed with them for fifteen months. It is also to her credit that in the later edition

which, in 1635, in her old age, she presented to Richelieu, she cut down Montaigne's eulogium of herself.[1]

After Montaigne's death, she had freedom, her mother having died a year before him. And, with the acquisition of freedom, she lost some of her force, and narrowed down into the literary lady. She was left well-off and independent, with a young brother and sister in her charge, and she lost no time in coming with them to Paris, with the purpose of cultivating men of letters and moving in distinguished society. She delighted in keeping up elaborate correspondences with celebrated scholars. Justus Lipsius, a famous *savant*, living in the Netherlands, exchanged periods with her. When her 'adopted father' died, Lipsius offered, with many learned scrolls and flourishes, to become her 'adopted brother.' In such amenities, fit for a Minerva, her soul delighted. And, after her own fashion, she

[1] M. Mario Schiff thinks that in the edition of 1595 Mademoiselle de Gournay has indulged her romantic imagination, and that she actually invented and inserted the high-flown praises of herself which, in 1635, she omitted. It must be owned that the omission is mysterious. Modesty is not enough to account for it, for modesty would have impelled her to leave out the passage altogether. (See *Marie de Gournay*: Mario Schiff.)

enjoyed the world. Like other prisoners suddenly set at liberty, she gave way, she tells us, to extravagance. But she does not seem to have done anything much more unbridled than keep a coach—which was almost a necessity, considering the condition of Paris pavements—and two footmen where she need only have had one. She also had a page, and a page well-suited to a votaress of literature, for he was the illegitimate son of Ronsard's page, Amadis Jamyn, and so, as it were, a kind of indirect grandson of the Pléiade. In many ways Mademoiselle was something of a Spartan. She slept on a woollen mattress; she had no women servants, only, for some months, a girl who played to her on the lute to dispel her melancholy; her table was simple for her day, and she never invited more than a few guests.

A choice circle gathered round her. She threw herself into public affairs, and, gradually giving up scholarship, she became a well-known pamphleteer. And a very audacious one. Although her pages are full of quotations and reflections from Montaigne, in this she was the opposite of him—that she was, to use modern parlance, a born revolutionary. Had he lived, she might have

remained a Conservative, but, with her bold instincts, this is not likely. Her treatise on the education of princes might easily have sent her to the Bastille. 'All men,' it proclaims, 'are born under the laws of equality. Each one of those who will some day live beneath thy [the prince's] sceptre is capable of becoming what thou art.'

The pamphlet was never even answered. No more was her defence of equal rights for women, in *Grief des Dames* and in *l'Égalité des hommes et des femmes*—wine new enough to burst the old bottles. Quite as heterodox also was her *Avis aux gens d'Église*. In these matters she was in advance of her time. But her chief title to fame lay not in politics, it lay in her writings on the French language, and here she changed her rôle. She did not desire the new. The reforms she made for were only revivals; she wished to preserve old words, to resuscitate many long since disused. It has been supposed that she was the herald of the innovating Hôtel de Rambouillet, but this is far from the truth. She was not a pioneer, she was a conserver. Like most originals, she was laughed at, especially for the old words that she tried to restore. Saint-Évremond wrote a play to ridicule her,

and Richelieu, with questionable taste, paid her a sardonic compliment, couched in antiquated terms taken from her works. Her spirited retort, 'You are laughing at a poor old woman, but laugh, great genius, laugh on—every one must contribute to your amusement,' found favour with the Minister. Never was repartee better paid. 'The Cardinal, surprised at the old maid's presence of mind, asked her pardon.' Presently he told his follower, Boisrobert, that 'something must be done for her'—she should have a pension of two hundred crowns.

'"But she has servants," said Boisrobert. "Who are they?" answered the Cardinal. "Mademoiselle Jamyn," replied Boisrobert, the bastard of Amadis Jamyn, the page of Ronsard." "I give him fifty *livres* a year," said the Cardinal. "Then there is Madame Paillon," added Boisrobert—"that is the cat." "I give her twenty *livres* a year," rejoined his Eminence, "on condition that she has kittens." "But, monseigneur, she *has* had kittens," said Boisrobert. The Cardinal added one pistole more for the kittens.'[1]

Those who laughed at her, and they were many, were not usually as kind as the Minister.

[1] *Historiettes de Tallemant des Réaux.*

The little Académie which, together with a colleague or two, she founded to further her ideas concerning language, did not make them laugh the less. From 1637 onwards, it met in her salon, an Académie in name, but in fact no more than a small group of poetasters and grammarians. The poetasters and grammarians of other groups used her as their target. And it must be owned that she gave them opportunity. She indulged in literary mystifications; proposed to publish a complete edition of Ronsard's poems; doctored them with long interpolations of her own — supposed improvements — 'to rescue him from oblivion.' The publication of this work was mercifully prevented, but it did not add to her reputation. Her conceit was naïf, impregnable.

When she showed her epigrams to a well-known poet of the day, and he told her that they were worthless and without point, she merely answered that they were epigrams *à la Grecque*, and, in such, point was out of place. Her faults and her virtues, alike innocent, did not age well, they attracted ridicule. Nor did she mend matters by her gallant defence of the then unpopular Jesuits. Her quixotism, her undiscerning generosity, her exactingness

and self-satisfaction, were not the qualities that appealed to her generation. 'Luckily we missed the Damoiselle de Montaigne, M. Courart and I, when we went to call upon her a week ago,' wrote the poet, Chapelain—'I pray God that we may always do this when we go to see her.' She became a kind of butt for the merciless wits of Paris, and they played practical jokes upon her which may well, in after years, have inspired Molière. The versifier, Racan, was one day going to call and see her for the first time, and two wags, getting wind of this, reached her house before him, and, in turn, impersonated him to her, so that when the real man arrived she, utterly bewildered, ejected him, with cries of '*Au voleur!*' The same tasteless jesters sent her a letter, supposed to come from an English cleric, to beg her to write her Life for a collection of biographies of illustrious men and women which James I. had ordered to be made. She took six weeks over her autobiography, and despatched it to England, to the complete mystification of the recipient. But James evidently kept it with some respect, for there is a record of his taking it from his cabinet and showing it to the French ambassador. Even such tricks

as these are not, however, so unkind as the note that the man of letters, Balzac, sent to Chapelain, when she lay dying.

'Last time she wrote,' he said, 'she warned me it was for the last time, and that she did not think she would have leisure to await my answer in this world. I thought her a woman of her word, and imagined her already inhabiting the Elysian fields; for, as you know, she has had no acquaintance with Abraham's bosom, and never had much of a passion for Paradise.'

Balzac, Chapelain, Racan, had shallower hearts, probably, than she, as well as more brilliant tongues. She was lonely, but she had consolations in her solitude. She corresponded with St. François de Sales; Justus Lipsius remained faithful to her. And, after all, what mattered pedants, poetasters, satirists, whether her friends or her foes? She had had the love of Montaigne, and that was the thought which must have been with her when she died in 1645.

. . . . .

Montaigne's death took place more than half a century before hers, in the year 1592. His life had known few outward changes. Lénor, his daughter, had married, and had, let us hope, provided him with the son-in-law

whom he desired. But he did not live to see the birth of his grandchild. He died, as he would have wished, at Montaigne, enjoying existence almost to the end.

'I want men,' he said, 'to act, to prolong the offices of life as long as possible; and I should like Death to find me planting my cabbages, indifferent to his coming, and still more to my imperfect garden.'[1]

He had mastered the art of indifference. He was the supreme pessimist: he loved the moment. Yet he sat loose to life—and he practised his precepts.

'I am at this hour in such condition, thanks to God, that I am ready to flit when it pleaseth Him, without a single regret for anything, unless it be for life itself. . . . I am busy untying myself everywhere; my farewells are half made to one and all, excepting to myself. Never hath man prepared himself to leave the world with freer, fuller heart; never hath he more universally lost hold than I am now setting myself to do.'[2]

He had, indeed, no dread of death, but he had a great dread of dying. Not of pain, but of paraphernalia; of the 'army of doctors and

[1] *Essais*, i. 20: 'Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir.'
[2] *Ibid.*

weepers,' who alone, he thought, made death terrible. Doctors he covered with his serene scorn. 'I do not quarrel with them,' he says, 'but with their art; nor do I blame them much for making their profit out of our foolishness. . . . Many other vocations, better and worse than theirs, have no foundation or support except in public abuses. I summon them when I am ill, if they happen to be there at the right moment. . . . They may choose whether my soup shall be made of hotch-potch vegetables or of lettuces, they can order me white wine or claret; and so with all other things that are merely indifferent to my appetite.'[1]

This was all he found to say for the Faculty. As for the 'weepers,' they made him long that he might end in battle, far from home, or among simple village folk who took death as a matter of course.

'It is,' he says, 'the dreadful looks, the grim apparatus with which we surround Death, that affright us. Quite a new aspect of life—the cries of mothers, of wives, of children, visits from dazed, heart-broken people; the presence of numbers of pale footmen, their eyes swollen with crying; a dark room, lighted

[1] *Essais*, ii. 37: 'De la Ressemblance des enfants aux pères.

tapers, our couch besieged by physicians and preachers—in short, every kind of horror and alarm around us. There we are—already dead and buried. Children are afraid of their friends even, when they see them masked. So are we. We must unmask things as well as people. And whoso will take this mask away will find nothing underneath but the same Death whom a lackey or a simple housemaid passed by the other day without fear.'[1]

Montaigne fulfilled his dearest wish—he died naturally. 'In this last piece played between Death and you,' he had once said, 'there is no more pretending; you must speak French; you must show what you really have of good and clean at the bottom of the pot.'[2]

He spoke French, he was Montaigne, to the close. The accounts of his end differ. His friend, Pierre de Brach, has recorded that during his last illness he had no one near him to whom to talk out his soul; yet somebody there probably was, for the historian, Florimond de Raymond, mentions his power of talking philosophy between bouts of suffering.

[1] *Essais*, i. 20: 'Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir.'

[2] *Essais*, i. 19: 'Qu'il ne faut juger de notre heur qu'après la mort.'

Pasquier, again, describes him as speechless for the last three days, and only able to talk with his pen. All three pictures are characteristic, and all three were probably true at some moment or another of that time. But there is one record which convinces us concerning the last moments of all. He rose, it was told, from his bed and got into his dressing-gown; he threw open his closet; he bade enter a waiting crowd of servants and legatees, and then and there himself gave them his bequests. He summoned a few of his neighbours, country gentlemen, his comrades and companions. The priest came; he administered the Sacraments; the dying man was fully conscious; at the Elevation of the Host he made a pious sign of recognition—and, as he made it, his spirit passed away. He departed as he had lived, decorously, with due observance, uninspired by any spiritual vision.

. . . . .

France mourned for his death, and the first report we have of the general sorrow is, strange to say, in a letter to an Englishman. Pierre de Brach had known Anthony Bacon intimately at Bordeaux, and it is to this old friend of Montaigne's, in England, that Brach

turns in the first days of their loss—the more so, as the last letter that Montaigne read before his illness was one from Anthony, who had not allowed their intercourse to lapse.

'I am,' wrote Brach, 'so touched to the quick by a new sorrow, by the tidings of the death of M. de Montaigne, that I no more belong to myself. In him I have lost my best friend; France, the mind the most whole and the most vital that ever she hath possessed; and the world the true pattern and mirror of pure philosophy, to the which he hath borne witness as well beneath the stroke of death as in what he wrote during his lifetime; nor, so far as I have heard, did the great last scene in any way belie his noble words. The last letter that he received was from you, the which I sent him. He hath not answered it, because he had to answer Death. Yet Death could only take what was Death's; the rest, and the better part, his name and his memory, will only die with the death of all things, and will stand firm.'[1]

It is not unfitting that Montaigne's life should end upon the note of friendship.

[1] *The French Renaissance in England*, Sidney Lee. Letter quoted in note on p. 173, from Anthony Bacon's MSS. at Lambeth (British Museum Additional MSS. 4610, f. 123).

## V

MONTAIGNE died, but he survived. Never, perhaps, has great man died less than he. He has left himself body and soul behind him, in the *Essays*. We have already heard how and why he wrote them. There is no self-portraiture more deliberate, or more desultory. It was a safety-valve for his experience of life —an outlet for his need of expression. 'No pleasure,' he tells us, 'hath any savour for me unless I can communicate it. And if it be no more than a gay thought the which hath come into my head, I feel vexed to produce it all alone and to have no one to whom to offer it.'[1]

'Had I found some one to talk to I would gladly, had I been able, have chosen the form of conversation as a means of setting forth my notions. I needed what I once used to have, a certain kind of intercourse which attracted, which sustained, which uplifted me. For to

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

hold negotiations with the wind, as others do, I could not do it. . . . I, the enemy of all falsification, I should have been more careful, more sure-footed, could I but have addressed myself to a staunch friend, than I am when I have to direct my words to a many-headed public.'[1]

And yet, besides this casual expansiveness, he had, as we know, a set purpose in writing his *Essays*, a serious purpose, however gaily he dressed it. He desired to 'mould life' by living—on paper, as in real existence; and since he could probe no life so truly as his own, he exposed it without scruple and without vanity. For his self-revelation is a statement—cheerful, cold, sane, and free from any puling element, any luxury of self-pity or self-interest. It is difficult to guess how far he gauged his own dimensions. 'At one moment I place them high, at another low,'[2] he says of the *Essays*. He would have us believe in their haphazardness. But the looseness of his form implied no vagueness of thought; it concealed, indeed, a more deliberate design than he wished the random reader to suspect. 'The subjects,' he writes,

[1] *Essais*, i. 40: 'Considération sur Cicéron.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 8: 'De l'Art de conférer.'

'are all linked the one to the other.'[1] And if he also writes that he 'found it strange' that 'persons of intellect should trouble their heads' to provide him with a system, that was only because he wanted to hit the Schoolmen, to teach them that formality is not one with form, that order can be maintained without headings, that ease is not ignorance, but mastery; because, of *malice prepense*, he desired to lead all pedants astray.

His desultoriness was also a matter of style, a part of his conception of autobiography. And there is no autobiographer in the world who would not profit by reading Montaigne. The *Essays* are a kind of epitome of the art of self-revelation, and an art, as he gives it us, so modern that we can hardly believe he lived in his century. The classical tradition of adulation in Renaissance, Greek, and Latin, the tedium of heroics and of *oraisons funèbres* revolted him. He broke with all such antecedents, and returned to Nature. Before all things, he demanded truth—unvarnished, but neither sour-faced nor puritanic. 'I have not the slightest wish to be better loved and respected when I am dead than in my life-

[1] *Essais*, iii. 5: 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'

time,'[1] he said. 'I am hungry to make myself known. . . . All the world recogniseth me in my book and my book in me.'[2]

'I am not setting up a statue to stand in the chief square of a town, or in a church, or in any public place. . . . It is rather for the corner of a library and the amusement of a neighbour, a relation, a friend, who will enjoy recovering my acquaintance, frequenting me once more in this my image. Other men have taken courage to talk about themselves, for that they found the theme a worthy and a rich one. I have chosen it contrariwise—for that I have found it thin and sterile to such a degree that no one can suspect me of ostentation. . . . I do not, indeed, find so much good in myself that I cannot tell it without blushing.'[3]

'If I speak of myself diversely, it is because I think of myself diversely. By some trick, in some fashion, every contradiction meeteth in me. I am shamefaced and insolent; chaste and luxurious; a prater and taciturn; laborious and delicate; clever and stupid; peevish and good-humoured; a liar and a truth-teller;

[1] *Essais*, ii. 37: 'De la Ressemblance des enfants aux pères.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 5: 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'
[3] *Essais*, ii. 18: 'Du Démentir.'

learned and ignorant . . . miserly and extravagant.'[1] 'I would gladly come back from the other world to give the lie to him who tried to make me other than I was, although he were trying to do me honour. I feel that even living men are spoken of as different from what they are, and if I had not, with all my force, kept hold of the friend whom I have lost, I should have had his true countenance split up into a thousand other countenances.'[2]

'Whatever my ineptitudes, I have no more mind to hide them than I should have to hide a portrait of myself with bald head and hair turning grey—a portrait in which the painter had drawn a face not perfect, but mine own. For the humours and opinions I set down here belong to *me*. I give them because I believe them, not because they are what ought to be believed. I have no aim but to discover myself—and to-morrow myself will peradventure be another, if some new apprenticeship chance to change me. I bear no authority that would make men believe me, nor do I desire it: I feel myself too ill-taught to teach others.'[3]

[1] *Essais*, ii. 1: 'De l'Inconstance de nos actions.'

[2] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

[3] *Essais*, i 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'

'And as for the public, the only relation I hold with it herein is that I borrow from it the tools it useth for writing. . . . In compensation, it may be that I shall keep some pat of butter from melting in the market'[1]—(because it might be wrapped in a fragment of his *Essays*).

'In painting myself for others, I have painted myself for myself in colours more decided than the real ones.'[2] . . . 'As Michel de Montaigne, not as a grammarian, or a poet, or a lawyer. And if the world should complain that I talk too much of myself, I complain that it does not even know *how* to talk of itself.'[3]

'It is custom which hath made it criminal to speak of oneself and hath obstinately forbidden it, hating the sense of brag, the which seemeth ever to attach to such as furnish their own testimonials. Instead of blowing the child's nose as you ought, you take away its nostrils. I think that there is more harm than good in this remedy. . . . If I say what I really believe, I hold that custom is wrong to condemn wine because some men

[1] *Essais*, ii. 18: 'Du Démentir.'
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Essais*, iii. 2: 'Du Repentir.'

get drunk upon it; it is only good things which can be abused.'[1]

Candour even to crudity, happy confession without repentance or the smallest need of absolution, such is Montaigne's notion of autobiography. The one thing he exacted from himself was never to make copy out of himself; was to be a man first, a writer afterwards—a man as complete as might be on all sides. This was a capital clause of his creed.

'Whatever I be,' he says, 'I wish to be that thing elsewhere than on paper. I have used my art and my industry that I might make myself felt; my studies that I might learn to do, not to write. Every effort of mine has only been directed to form my life. That is my trade and my work. I am less a maker of books than of anything. I have always desired just enough of a fortune to satisfy real and pressing conveniences, not to turn such a competence into a magazine and store for my heirs.'[2]

Style was essential to him — the primal equipment of a writer. By culling here and there in the *Essays* we could easily collect a perfect compendium for authors, an anthology for critics. He has said most things that can

[1] *Essais*, ii. 6: 'De l'Exercitation.'

[2] *Essais*, ii. 37: 'De la Ressemblance des enfants aux pères.'

be said on style. And style, as he conceived it, could not exist without two qualities—clearness and simplicity. 'It was,' he wrote, 'with good reason that childhood and simplicity were so much commended by Truth itself';[1] and the words, though they bore no literary import, might be taken as a definition of Montaigne's literary ideal.

'I hear people excuse themselves,' he says elsewhere, 'for not being able to express themselves; they make a show of having their heads full of a great many fine things, but for lack of eloquence, say they, they cannot bring them out. That is humbug. Do you know what in my opinion all these fine things are? They are shadows which come from a few shapeless conceptions, and since they can neither disentangle nor clear them up inside themselves, they cannot produce them outside: they do not yet understand themselves. . . . For my part, I hold . . . that whoso hath in his mind a vital and lucid thought, will produce it.'[2]

And he will produce it vitally and lucidly. Montaigne tells him how to do so.

'The kind of speech that I like,' he writes,

[1] *Lettres de Montaigne*: A M. de Mesmes.

[2] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'

'is a simple, naïf speech, the same upon paper as upon the lips—a succulent, nervous speech, short and compressed, not so much combed and curled and coddled as vehement and brusque.'

'Force and nerves cannot be borrowed; you can only borrow cloaks and furbelows.'[1]

'Those who have a thin body, stuff it out with padding; those who have thin subject-matter swell it out with words.'[2]

Words—Montaigne's idols and his bugbears, according to their behaviour. They are, he thinks, the great danger of the second-rate; they help him to swim on in mere cleverness. He greatly disliked too much cleverness—the slightest suspicion of a superior manner or conscious brilliance. What was not spontaneous seemed to him dull. 'I find,' he says, 'no great difference between being unable to say things well and being able only to say them well.'[3] What was said was unimportant so long as it was aptly and sincerely said. 'A man who telleth truth can be as great a fool as he who telleth lies—for we are now upon the manner, not the matter of our utterance.'[4]

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Essais*, i. 40: 'Considération sur Cicéron.'
[4] *Essais*, iii. 8: 'De l'Art de conférer.'

And if matter be there, we need not trouble—it will mould the manner from within.

'One must not always say everything, for that would be folly; but what one doth say must be just what one thinketh; otherwise it turneth into evil.'[1]

The greatest evil of all, in Montaigne's eyes, was a departure from the obvious—affectation, pedantry, pursuit of novelty.

'Just as in our clothes it is a vanity to try to attract attention by some particular and unusual fashion, so is it in the matter of language. The search for new-fangled phrases and little-known words cometh from a pedantic, puerile ambition. May I only use such as are in use in the *Halles* of Paris!'[2]

'No man is exempt from the utterance of insipidities. The misfortune is when he uttereth them in an out-of-the-way fashion.'[3]

'A great many of our French writers of to-day . . . are bold and contemptuous enough not to follow the high-road; but their lack of invention and discretion ruineth them. You can find nothing in them but a miserable assumption of strangeness, of cold and absurd

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'
[2] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
[3] *Essais*, iii. 1: 'De l'Utile et de l'Honnête.

disguises, the which, instead of lifting the subject, drag it down. So long as they are strutting about pranked out in novelty, they do not care a jot for efficacy ; and for the sake of getting hold of a new word, they leave the ordinary one, the which is often stronger and more nervous.'[1]

For such newsmongers—for the throng of professional authors and poetasters — for all men who wrote for writing's sake and not from the needs of a rich vitality, he has unbounded contempt. His Jeremiads seem to fit our own day even better than his.

'Some law should be passed,' he says, 'against inept and useless writers, like the laws against vagrants and ne'er-do-weels. In this fashion, the popular vote would banish me and a hundred others. This is no joke. Scribbling seemeth, indeed, to be the symptom of an unstrung generation. When have we written so much as since all our civil agitations? When did the Romans write so much as at the time of their ruin? When minds become more pointed and subtle, it doth not mean that they grow more wise.'[2]

It was Montaigne's distaste for subtleties,

[1] *Essais*, iii. 5 : 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 9 : 'De la Vanité.'

and their bad effect, as he thought, upon man's mind, that made him lay such strong stress upon frankness. An over-strong stress sometimes, almost amounting to fanaticism, and driving frankness over the bounds of decency. Yet his frankness had a serious purpose — it was not devoid of its own austerities.

'I have,' he wrote, 'commanded myself to *say* all that I dare to *do*. I am displeased even with such thoughts as are unpublishable. The worst of my deeds and moral states do not seem to me as ugly as the ugliness and cowardice of not being able to acknowledge them. He who would force himself to say everything would force himself to do none of the things one is now constrained to do. God grant that this excess of licence on my part may draw the men of our time towards liberty, the which is far above those mincing, cowardly virtues born of our imperfections.'[1]

There is a goodness greater than virtue, stronger and more immutable than the shifting moralities of men. That it existed was not Montaigne's discovery—it was the discovery of the human race. It has preserved that race, it has led it, through all its blind errors of

[1] *Essais*, iii. 5: 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'

faith and reason—its bigotries, its heresies, its fanaticisms—through the stormy clash of instinct and idea—through its dark gropings after truth, towards the light. This fundamental goodness Montaigne recognised, although he seldom said so; he believed in it, although his belief most often took the form of a protest against current virtues and accepted moral standards. He believed in it more than he knew—too much, perhaps, to give it a name.

The scope of Montaigne's *Essays*, indeed, far transcended his ken. He once called them 'a heap of flowers from abroad, to which I have added nothing of mine own but the thread which bindeth them'; but the flowers have faded, while the thread remains. His book is more his than most men's books are theirs, and to it might well be applied his own words concerning quotations:

'I do not only regard them from the point of view of the use to which I put them. Often, outside the limits of my subject, they bear in them the seed of some richer and more daring matter; they strike a subtler undernote—both for me who had no wish to express so many things, and for those who may chance upon my tune.'[1]

[1] *Essais*, i. 40: 'Considération sur Cicéron.'

Who chances on that tune is forced to listen, whether he will or no. And it is not one to please the majority. We can but lend Montaigne a close attention, and turn to the *Essays* themselves.

# MONTAIGNE THE PHILOSOPHER

MICHEL SEIGNEUR DE-MONTAGNE

*From an anonymous portrait at Bordeaux, old but not contemporary, although very likely based upon an older picture.*

# MONTAIGNE THE PHILOSOPHER

MONTAIGNE is the typical Frenchman—an epitome of his country. His pellucid matter-of-factness—his crystal conceptions—his scepticism born of irony and modesty—his sunny materialism—his Titanic common-sense, brave, unwinking, confident—his knowledge of the road—his indifference to the heavens, excepting as they rained or shone, caused him comfort or discomfort—his forcible, stinging insight, which, when condensed, became epigram—his stoical humour—his austere good-taste—his width of view for every day—his limited outlook on futurity—his acknowledgment of the appetites as legitimate sons of the house, to be welcomed, even encouraged, as the means of cheering life—his respect for facts before imaginative truth—all these gifts and defects are the heritage of France—of La Rochefoucauld, of Voltaire, of Anatole France, as well as of Michel de Montaigne. From all these points of view he stands as the monumental Frenchman—the monumental critic.

For criticism is the genius of France, and Montaigne made criticism creative. He is the first representative of a splendid dynasty; just as Shakespeare is perennially the type of English genius—of creative imagination. Rabelais, Montaigne's great predecessor, was not a critic but an innovator. He gave birth to new ideas, instead of, like Montaigne, giving a new colour to thought. Rabelais, the giant, as he rose rebellious from Chaos, scattered mud from the road as he strode forward, but there was that within him which could not be besmirched—there was the poet. Montaigne had no touch of the poet in his composition—his means were always adequate to his end. And here we come to his strange limitation. Montaigne was ignorant of the power of an idea, ignorant of its very existence. To live for an idea was a possibility outside his consciousness. To die for an idea seemed to him a mere offence against reason, a madness, an act of nervous derangement. 'Excess of virtue,' he tells us, appeared in his eyes worse than 'excess of vice'; an ideal, a spendthrift frivolity; an aspiration, a sin of ignorant presumption and self-indulgence. And in this, too, he was not least a Frenchman. The statement sounds like a paradox in a

country where the Terror itself was the debauch of an idea, and where men, revolutionists and sectarians, have so often marched to ruin for the sake of a Cause. But if we look closer, we shall see that their fall has generally come from ignorance of the nature of an idea, not from devotion to it. They do not know that an idea is so big that men cannot walk to the end of it; they do not know that its horizon must be mist. From Calvin and Pascal to Rousseau, they have treated an idea as finite; they have believed that by the use of logic they can come out on the other side. And Montaigne was but the *ne plus ultra* of this tendency. He was devoid of spiritual wish or outlook; he knew everything about Monday and nothing at all about Sunday.

But here, again, he was not consistent. There was one point at which he became a poet, an idealist. It was friendship. In friendship, Montaigne was higher than his stature. His love for La Boétie lifted him to another plane—it taught him hero-worship. Montaigne, in whose creed self-preservation was almost the first article, who, although he was mayor of Bordeaux, would not enter the plague-stricken city, refused to leave his friend's bedside, in spite of a warning that the

illness was contagious. Montaigne, to whom excessive feeling was as a sin, was so dominated by sorrow that twenty years after La Boétie's death, as he sat one day alone at the Baths of Lucca, the sense of his loss suddenly swept over him with the freshness of a grief of yesterday. It haunts his *Essays*; it haunted him. One feels there were few days when he did not wake and say with the same shock of surprise, 'La Boétie is dead!' No one has written as nobly as he has done about friendship—not even Shakespeare; for La Boétie had no attraction of good looks, and Montaigne dwells only on his inner beauty.

'In true friendship, in the which I am an expert, I give myself to my friend even more than I draw him unto me. Not only had I liefer do him good than that he should do it unto me; but, furthermore, that he should do good to himself rather than to me. In past days I was wont to gather gain and use from our separation; we fulfilled the better the measure of life, we widened its borders, when we were parted one from the other; he lived, he enjoyed, he saw for me, and I for him, as fully as if he had been there; one part of us remained idle when we were together—we were fused the one in the other. Division in

space rendered more rich the conjunction of our wills. That insatiate hunger for bodily presence doth, in truth, somewhat proclaim a weakness in the true enjoyment of souls.'[1]

Or again: 'In this friendship whereof I speak, our souls commingle and confound themselves the one with the other in a fusion so entire that they lose themselves each in each, and can no longer find the seam which joined them. . . . In this noble commerce those services and kindnesses which feed other friendships are not worthy to be reckoned. . . . For all, indeed, is common between them . . . wills, thoughts, judgments, possessions . . . life and honour. . . . If . . . one could give to the other, it would be he who received the benefaction who would do good to his companion.[2] . . . And our spirits, his and mine, were so closely yoked together, considering one another with an ardent affection . . . which so lay bare the very entrails of being, that not only did I know his soul as I knew mine, but I would certainly have trusted myself more willingly to his hands than to mine own.'[3]

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'
[2] *Essais*, i. 28: 'De l'Amitié.'
[3] *Ibid.*

How warm this rings, how it glows, by the side of Bacon's praise of friendship as an excellent intellectual investment—an advantageous partnership by which, if a man be careful, he may make mental capital!

Montaigne's sorrow struck him when he was over thirty, at the sharpest moment of experience, when he was too old to have life still before him, and young enough to feel the mortal pain of a gun-shot that left him maimed for the rest of his days.

His friend's death coloured his existence more than any event in it; it recurs oftener than any in his pages. This it was, no doubt, that accentuated another almost poetic tendency in him. He was haunted by death, and had been from his youth onwards. The omnipresence of the image of mortality was common enough in his day. Death and danger were always before men's eyes; they lived close to war and pestilence; close, too, to the Latin classics and their reflections upon the transitoriness of life. But Montaigne's attitude towards death was not theirs —it was more intense. His thought was pitched in a higher key than was usual with him. As a young man, so he tells us, when he was returning from wild midnight revels,

from feasting and wit and all enchantments, the sense of finality would suddenly sweep over him without warning, would pursue him through the dark streets, and blot out thought, and crush the pleasure to lose which he regarded as moral suicide.

The six years of union were unclouded, and, when they were over, the task of editing his friend's writings was his one consolation. Montaigne's love even got the better of his strong disbelief in immortality. 'I have tried,' he said, 'with these fragments to . . . bring him back to life. I think that in some fashion he feeleth this, and that these good offices of mine touch him and rejoice his spirit. But, in truth, he still lodgeth within me so living, and so whole that I can neither believe the earth to lie heavy upon him, nor that he can be far removed from our companionship.'[1]

These patches of warmer, finer feeling, even while they ennoble him, seem unnatural. We ask ourselves why they are there to perturb his equanimity. Does the answer, or part of it, lie in the mixed strain of his blood? For Montaigne was a Gascon and Montaigne was a Jew, and the fusion of Jew and Frenchman

[1] *Lettres de Montaigne*: A M. de Mesmes.

suggests a conflict of irreconcilable elements. Perhaps the thoughts and qualities that seem incongruous in him, the baffling contradictions which run like multi-coloured threads through his nature, may be, to some degree, explained by the strange mixture. The elements are such that the threads are bound to remain separate; to run alongside of each other without meeting.

Montaigne's Jewish descent, indeed, tells in more ways than one, in the lesser as well as the greater. To Frenchmen, their patriotism is a *sine qua non*, the love of their country an essential force. But Montaigne, for all his Gallic-ness, was a deliberate cosmopolitan. 'It is not,' he writes, 'for that Socrates hath said it, but rather that it is mine own humour —peradventure even to some excess—that I consider all men my compatriots; and I embrace a Pole as gladly as I would a Frenchman, subordinating the natural bond to that which is common and universal. Nature sent us free into the world and unshackled; it is we who imprison ourselves in narrow straits.'[1]

Nor is Montaigne's philosophy devoid of the Jewish element. We need stretch no point to detect it. There is often a kind of

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

intensity in his power of balance which contrasts with his general coolness and with the temperament of his day. And now and then, though rarely, his scepticism is touched with emotion—an emotion which, again, is foreign to him; his prose assumes the style of an opportunist prophet, if such there be. As here, for instance:

'For this world is a very holy temple into the which man is ushered, there to look upon divers images, carven by no mortal hand, but such as the Divine Thought hath fashioned to be apprehended of the senses: the sun, the stars, the waters, and the earth, the which are symbols of the invisible truth that is to be apprehended by the intelligence alone.'[1]

Such a passage comes almost like a shock in the midst of Montaigne's fat pasture-lands of utilitarianism.

'Transcendent humours,' he says elsewhere (and he says it not once but often), 'affright me like unto high and inaccessible places; and I find nothing hard to swallow in the life of Socrates except his ecstasies, and what he telleth us concerning his "Daimon." . . . To my mind, the finest lives are those which are cut upon the common human pattern, orderly,

[1] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

without miracle or extravagancy.[1] All actions that are in the least extraordinary are subject to wrong interpretation, for that our will reacheth no more nearly what is above it than what is below it.'[2]

Yet another day, the apostle of a complete content with incompleteness can write—like Shakespeare or Browning—

'The world is but one perennial motion; all things in it move unceasingly, the earth, the boulders of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt—each with the universal motion no less than with its own; constancy itself is no other than a more languid motion. . . . Could my soul but take root, I should no longer make experiment, I should resolve; but my soul is bound apprentice, and stands on trial for evermore.'[3]

What tide in his breast compelled Montaigne to make a statement so far outside himself? His normal point of view is strangely different.

'He who walketh in the crowd must swerve aside and draw in his elbows, must retreat or advance, must even leave the straight road,

[1] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 2: 'De l'Ivrognerie.'
[3] *Essais*, iii. 2: 'Du Repentir.'

according to what he meeteth upon his way. . . .'[1]

'For tender stomachs there is need of artificial ordinances and constraint; good stomachs simply make use of the ordinances prescribed by natural appetites.'[2] This is his creed, constantly reiterated under many shapes. We have but to open the *Essays* at random—we shall hardly fail to light upon some such passage.

Montaigne's contribution to the forces of life, his unique legacy to the world, is not fresh thought, it is fresh form. It is difficult to separate the two, or to overestimate the value of a new mode of expression that exists not for an age, but for all time. A gift such as this needs just a Montaigne—a creative critic, not a poet; and so Montaigne invented the Essay.

Many of his thoughts were there before him. Rabelais had stood up as the champion of 'Dame Nature' against asceticism, had shifted the boundary-lines of morality, had laughed pedantry to scorn with his huge laughter. Erasmus and Reuchlin had broken blades for tolerance; Dolet had died for free-thought; the French mystics, with the saints and the

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'
[2] *Ibid.*

Book of Ecclesiastes at their back, had belittled human knowledge; Ronsard had trumpeted Hedonism, and, together with many Renaissance cardinals, submitted his words to Mother Church, and reinstated Paganism in his actions; while, as a body, the Humanists made war upon the stupid, and started enlightened systems of education. The bullion was ready on the quay, but Montaigne found the means of transit. Who knows how long the gold might not have lain there? He made it into current coin—not only, as it hitherto had been, for the intellectual, but also for the common and the ignorant. He stood upon no height, but came down in working clothes into the market-place, and loitered, as it were, among his audience. When, in speaking of the education of children, he wrote that every schoolroom should be strewn with flowers, he said what all parents could understand, and said it so pleasurably that he inclined them to follow his advice, effecting more than a score of the treatises on education then in vogue.

Montaigne, indeed, invented the art of criticism of life—and, inventing the Essay with it, he gave that art the only mode informal enough to express it—deliberately informal,

in spite of his insistence on his carelessness. He was the father of all essayists and aphorists to come—of La Rochefoucauld, of La Bruyère, of Addison, of Lamb, of Hazlitt. He was, indeed, the first man of letters, as we conceive such. He fulfilled the great function of literature: he made wisdom attractive.

And if he was the father of the essayists, he was also the father of the modern novelist. For Montaigne may be said to have been the initiator of psychology—of a subtle personal note in his study of life and men that was unknown before him, a study made at closer quarters with his kind than any ventured by his predecessors. Until his day, the scholars and *literati* of the Renaissance aimed at uniformity, at an even style, even in their letters—a standard fostered by the general use of Latin as a literary medium. The intrusion of the individual element was regarded as a sin against taste—a natural style was a vulgar one. The current conception of literature and the art of writing was that it should be elegant and non-natural. For a Rabelais it was easier to transgress these laws, because his thought took the shape of satire, and he spoke through the mouth of certain *dramatis personæ*. For Montaigne the task was harder, because

hitherto unattempted. The one book of his day that resembles him in its modernness, its familiar human touch, is the Memoirs of Marguerite de Navarre, and it is only when we have read his *Essays* that we realise how much she was his disciple—a disciple from kinship, not from mere imitation. The same may be said of her letters and those of his other great pupil, her husband, Henri IV.—letters in both cases so fresh and racy, so distinct from all sixteenth-century correspondence, that they seem to mark a frontier-line between the old and the new; to leave the past behind them and reach towards us, bridging over the gulf of time.

'Others form men, I record them,'[1] Montaigne said. . . . 'We know of none but two or three ancients who have cut out this path. . . . None since then have dared to tread in their footsteps. It is a thorny adventure, more even than appeareth, to follow a course so vagabond as that of the mind, to dive down into the opaque depths of its innermost recesses, to arrest in their flight the light breezes that perturb it. This is, in truth, a new and passing strange amusement, and one which withdraweth us from the common business of

[1] *Essais*, iii. 2: 'Du Repentir.'

the world.'[1] This 'amusement' led him straight to the point. 'There existeth as great a difference between us and ourselves as between us and others.'[2] So Montaigne said nearly a century before Pascal, in his *Pensées*, wrote, 'No man is so different from another as one man is from himself.' 'It appertaineth not,' he goes on, 'to a well-balanced understanding to judge ourselves simply by our outward actions. We must sound the inner depths and search out what springs cause the motion; but, for that it is a hazardous and high emprise, I should wish that fewer persons concerned themselves therein.'[3]

Here is the secret of the knowledge of character—the secret of the novelist and playwright, the knowledge that Montaigne acquired so richly. And in what region did he acquire it? That was another of his inventions. He found the knowledge in himself, the one safe method of getting at the truth. He discovered himself like an America—a new world, strange and yet his own, full of endless interest to feed his curiosity.

'For some years I have had no one but

[1] *Essais*, ii. 6: 'De l'Exercitation.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 1: 'De l'Inconstance de nos actions.'
[3] *Ibid.*

myself as an object for my thoughts; I have controlled, I have studied none other; and if ever I study something else, it is that I may turn it on, or, rather, into myself. Nor can I think myself wrong if I behave as I do with other sciences . . . and impart my learning, however ill-pleased I be with my progress. There is no description so difficult to make as the description of oneself, nor one so useful.'[1] . . . 'At least I have this much of discipline—that never man treated subject that he understood . . . better than I do mine, and that herein I am the most learned scholar alive.'[2] . . . 'And I do not love myself so indiscreetly, nor am I so . . . commingled with myself that I cannot . . . consider myself apart, as if I were a neighbour or a tree.'[3] . . .

There is no corner of himself that Montaigne keeps from us—no secret of vice or virtue that he leaves unrevealed. His *Essays* are the frankest—perhaps the only frank—autobiography in existence. The one other record as confidential, for worse as well as for better, is the *Confessions* of Rousseau. But Rousseau's self-revelations, sordid or noble, do not carry con-

[1] *Essais*, ii. 6: 'De l'Exercitation.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 2: 'Du Repentir.'
[3] *Essais*, iii. 8: 'De l'Art de conférer.'

viction like those of Montaigne. We feel that his immoderate egoism, his poisonous vanity, made him love to exaggerate the evil that was in him as well as—even more than—the good; that he was neither so bad nor so high-minded as he makes out. He cannot look at himself for a moment without tears; every page is garbled by emotion. He is his own Galatea, with whom, great artist that he is, he falls in love as he works. And he works for the artist's end alone—to leave a picture, to make the impression that he desires to make.

Montaigne's motive is widely different. His aim is scientific before all else. An egoist he is in one sense—the sense of literal people—but his egoism is, so to speak, impersonal. He is exclusively preoccupied with himself because he wants to throw light upon human nature, and self-knowledge is his only sure means of obtaining scientific results. He regards himself with cool curiosity, without comment, more especially without the comment of emotion. Montaigne is never moved about himself, and so his account remains authentic. Unhistrionic, uncondemning, uncondoning, he states himself. An artist he is in his self-painting as well as a scientific man, but it is

with the art of the Dutch School—positive, unerring, impartial, rich in detail—an art which implies the cult of science.

That Montaigne did not originate ideas but rather lent them form and colour, was a fact that did not prevent him from transforming them. He put old conceptions in such a fresh aspect that he changed their nature, he threw a light upon them which altered proportions and made them unrecognisable. He renewed their vitality—they were born again. By giving a novel touch to worn terms, he added pages to the dictionary of life. If Montaigne's thought was not creative, it was original.

His practical philosophy has a thousand facets. Men have felt and written more differently about him, perhaps, than about any other author, according as one facet pleased them more than another. They have, maybe, tried too strenuously to make a connected system from the verdicts of one who boasted of human inconsistency and himself said: 'It seemeth to me strange when I see men of mind—as I sometimes do—giving themselves a world of pains to make order out of these stray pieces.'[1] To follow in the steps of his

[1] *Essais*, ii. 1: 'De l'Inconstance de nos actions.'

many commentators may be little better than repetition. But each new venturer in the field must see that, among the terms and conceptions that he regenerated, there are some more essential than the rest, and by grasping the significance he gave to these we get the key to the significance of all. Every one must bring his own light, and, however, inadequate it be, it may yet suffice to throw a ray upon some unobserved angle which has hitherto been hidden in obscurity.

If we understand Montaigne's version of the word moderation, and his attitude towards nature and knowledge, we shall understand the character of Montaigne's mind, for his views of nature and of knowledge involve his conception of religion.

The truth most widely known about him is probably his love of moderation. The Via Media was the one road he would travel on, and he insisted on good inns by the way, with a proper provision of crayfish and clean linen. He was a past-master of the map ; he knew the topography of the highway, and he made sure beforehand that it offered no pretence of leading him to any New Jerusalem. But his interpretation of temperance was hardly what

at first it appears. Montaigne was passive, but he was not resigned: no mere jog-trot, pessimist traveller content with *pis-allers*. He was bent upon enjoyment—the enjoyment of the spectator, but none the less real for that. His Via Media, unlike most roads of that name, was full of vitality and colour; his moderation was not negative, it was positive, and the importance of his choosing such a creed lay not in the choice itself, but in the motives that impelled it.

For Montaigne's temperance is largely the temperance of the Hedonist who dreads defeat, who learns that self-control adds flavour to pleasure, and that 'sweets grown common lose their dear delights.' 'Intemperance,' he says, 'is the pestilence which killeth pleasure; and temperance is not the flail of pleasure, it is the seasoning thereof.'[1] He disliked excessive vice, because it injured health and sanity; he disliked excessive virtue more, because he understood it less, and it irritated him as no fault of the senses did. He could not see any real motive in the conduct of heroes and martyrs, unless they belonged to the ancients, and he despised people who neglected safety. But he went further. He

[1] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'

also despised the young man who could not be dissolute and did not know where to stop. He not only wanted him to feel temptation, he wanted him to yield to it so that he might acquire the art of drawing in the rein. And he preferred him to be bad in good company. 'He may,' he said, 'laugh and frolic with a prince, he may even be dissolute in such society, but I desire that in his very dissoluteness he should excel his comrades in firmness and vigour, and that he should not cease from doing evil from any lack of strength or knowledge, but rather from a lack of inclination.'[1]

'There is, in truth,' says another *Essay*, 'no course of life so feeble and so foolish as a life led by system and by discipline. A young man should often plunge even into excesses; otherwise the least vice will ruin him, and he becomes tiresome and inconvenient in conversation.'[2]

Montaigne's counsels were not due to principle alone. The fact is that, like Shakespeare, he demanded before all things that a man should be a man. They both delighted in the 'proper man,' the splendid animal who was

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'

the child of Nature before he was the child of Art. Montaigne, the spectator in his armchair, with a mind of colder colour, loved the dash of scarlet in others, and especially in the young. But the scarlet must stop short—there must be no disturbance of the peace. And ever and again he comes back to his constant refrain—there must never be zeal. 'Immoderateness,' he says, 'even in what is good, if it doth not actually offend me, astoundeth me and leaveth me at a loss for a name wherewith to baptize it.'[1] 'We may grasp at virtue in such fashion as to make her vicious—if, that is, we desire to embrace her with too great suddenness and violence.'[2] 'The archer who overshooteth the mark doth the same as he who falleth short.... Callicles, in Plato, saith that the extreme of philosophy is harmful. . . . He saith true, for by its excess it enslaveth our natural freedom, and, by its importunate subtleties, it putteth us out of the beautiful broad high road, the which Nature hath mapped out for us.'[3]

'Prove all things, hold fast that which is convenient,' might well stand as the summary of Montaigne's code of moderation. His was

[1] *Essais*, i. 30: 'De la Modération.'
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*

not the temperance of self-conquest or of a high-minded wisdom; considering the wide margin that he allowed for the enjoyment of the senses, he had little temptation to withstand. His dispassionate contemplation of various vicious forms of self-indulgence, his appraisement of them merely as they were pleasurable and hygienic, or unrepaying and unhealthy, are mere matters of an orderly expediency. Like all accomplished ambassadors, Montaigne wanted to keep peace in the kingdom he represented—the kingdom of human nature: peace it was at almost any price, especially in his own domains, because emotion was disturbing and disagreeable. But of private enemies, we repeat, he had few to contend with. The only thing in which he was immoderate was his moderation, and even here he was aware of his danger. 'Temperance . . . drags me too far backwards,' he says, 'it even drags me into stupidity. I wish to be master of myself in every sense. Wisdom has its excesses, and has no less need of moderation than folly.'[1] He was perhaps a little intemperate, too, in his curiosity. He garnered every fact he could lay hands on with the lavishness and credulity of the collector;

[1] *Essais*, iii. 5: 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'

he was greedy for any sort of sensation. But he was so quick a reader of Life that he plucked the meaning out of a page in a moment, and had done with each experience before it hurt him.

Montaigne's moderation, if he had but known it, was largely made of good taste, and had he been born two centuries later, and used his taste in literary criticism, he would have stood as the greatest master of that art.

But good taste implies more than literary criticism. There is a kind of moral taste which is dignity, and of this quality Montaigne had rich store. 'Withdraw into yourself, but first prepare yourself to receive yourself,'[1] he said, and this was a central article of his creed. Self-control was one of the few virtues that he preached, but self-control in his vocabulary was hardly distinguishable from self-preservation. The power of restraint included, indeed, his highest point of view and his lowest—on the one hand, his care to preserve seemly, even noble proportions, his need of an often austere self-discipline; on the other, his cold determination to avoid disturbance, and his willingness to take refuge in any hovel that would give him shelter.

[1] *Essais*, i. 39: 'De la Solitude.'

'Few passions have troubled my sleep,' he says, . . . 'I gladly avoid steep and slippery slopes, and plunge into beaten tracks: and I choose thereof the muddiest and the swampiest, so that I cannot sink below it. Thus seek I safety.'[1] 'As to such affections as distract me from myself and attach me elsewhere, to these, in faith, I am opposed with all my strength. For I hold that we must lend ourselves to others and only give ourselves to ourselves.'[2]

'The prize for which the soul maketh, is not to walk on the heights, but to walk orderly. It practiseth not its greatness in greatness but in mediocrity.'[3]

His system of spiritual insurance was universal. It extended impartially to our most instinctive affections and our most cultivated ambitions.

'He who doth not cherish either his children or his honours with slavish inclination, may make sure of living comfortably when he hath lost them.'[4]

When, however, he turns his thoughts to the politics he so despised, his prudence often

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 10: 'De ménager sa volonté.'
[3] *Essais*, iii. 2: 'Du Repentir.'
[4] *Essais*, iii. 10: 'De ménager sa volonté.

becomes enlightenment. 'It is better,' he says, 'to make the laws desire what they can do, since they cannot do what they desire.'[1] Anything seems to him better than quick changes, because of the agitation that must precede them. But here, again, his moderation leads him very near the extravagance of sobriety that he deplores—of the kind, too, that almost touches cowardice. Reform was to him anathema: it became the symbol of intellectual arrogance and unnecessary discomfort.

'As long,' he wrote, 'as the image of the ancient laws received by this monarchy shineth on in any hole or corner, in that hole or corner do I plant myself. But if by evil fortune it should happen that they fall out among themselves, contravening one the other, so that two parties are produced difficult and doubtful of choice, then my decision will be gladly to escape and to get quit of the tempest.'[2]

At its best, Montaigne's creed of self-preservation often reminds us of that of Goethe. Both were dominated by good taste and good sense, which, with Montaigne some-

[1] *Essais*, i. 23: 'De la coutume et de ne changer aisément une loi reçue.'

[2] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'

times, with Goethe often, rose to wisdom; and both were almost tyrannised over by prudence, which they too often took for philosophy; both again, first by nature, then on principle, made something like a cult of mental equilibrium. Both were beneficent and cold—both loved security and hated any break in their calm. It was a natural consequence that both should dislike party politics and abstain from public affairs—and that both should have been able to provide the best moral reasons for doing so. Goethe would have sympathised with Montaigne in his first rejection of the mayorship of Bordeaux, no less than with his civic dignity in the subsequent fulfilment of his functions; would have sympathised, also, with his avoidance of infection when the town was smitten by the plague. As nearly as possible, these two men were purely intellectual — intellectual before they were human—and such as these (and they are few) must always distrust the warmer qualities and care most for the maintenance of proportion. Both, indeed, were men of positive science — though Goethe had the more creative genius, and, living in a scientific age, could better bring his gifts to the birth. Both again, to sum up, were born Pagans—

of the strongest kind, unconscious of their Paganism. But in Goethe's case, the poet in him ennobled the rest — his love of beauty enriched him—his worship of Nature helped him to an ideal Pantheism ; while Montaigne, who had little sense of beauty beyond that required of all Renaissance gentlemen, and whose attitude to Nature, on his travels, was a matter of curiosity or of geography, had no transmuting processes for his materialism. He remained a practical Pagan, absorbed in the problem before him: that of the union of prudence with the due enjoyment of the senses.

In speaking of Montaigne we must never forget his strong individual temperament. There was in him one great force which must be reckoned with. It was, as it were, a force in solution, which permeated all his views and unconsciously directed his decisions. This was his hatred of pedantry—Montaigne's *Pédanterie*, which included most offences against naturalness. To him, pedantry was the devil, to be fought with the whole human armoury. It was the feeling that he shared with Shakespeare—that, and a boundless curiosity, an appetite for experience, all alike parts of the equipment of a rich humanity. We cannot help a vain desire

that Montaigne could have known Malvolio. For the pedantry of virtue—any Puritanism—lashed Montaigne into his most stinging irony, and this hostility it is which colours his idea of moderation. Excessive or fastidious morality—'reforms'—*Huguenotteries*—asceticism—warmed him into anger, into action. Above all, asceticism, for that was a sin against Nature. Rabelais had been in the lists before him, had shown up the bitterly hated monks, had built his Abbey of Thelema and written *Fais ce que voudras* over its portal. Rabelais had been the pioneer. But Montaigne brought fresh vigour to the warfare, subtler and more modern weapons. And it is his conception of Nature which governs all the rest of his scheme. Like every other writer, he means a dozen different things when he says Nature. Yet his outlook upon them all is the same. 'We must judge,' he says, 'with more reverence of this infinite power of Nature—with more acknowledgment of our ignorance and weakness.'[1]

The various meanings he gives to the general term may be gathered up under three main headings. Of Nature in the Words-

[1] *Essais*, i. 27: 'C'est folie de rapporter le vrai et le faux à notre suffisance.'

worthian sense, of a great and consoling being, a world of beauty beyond ourselves, he knew nothing—such a notion was outside his period. But of natural phenomena and natural facts, of natural law, of natural instinct, he knew much. He observed patiently and impartially —he observed without emotion or prejudice —he observed in the critical spirit. 'There is nothing useless in Nature,' he said, 'not even uselessness.'[1] His vision of natural facts and phenomena was bound to be hampered in that pre-scientific age. But it was not the strength of the vision that failed, only the means of investigation. What he saw, he saw as clearly and fearlessly as any modern, and whatever allusion he makes in this direction is always amazingly advanced on the path of science—sometimes almost three centuries ahead.

'Concerning animals,' he says, 'this truth also holdeth, witness the sheep of Jacob, and partridges and hares, the which the snow whitens on the mountains. At my place, a short while ago, a cat was seen watching a bird at the top of a tree, and after they had for awhile stared fixedly one at the other, the bird let itself drop like a dead thing between the paws of the cat, intoxicated by its own

[1] *Essais*, iii. 1: 'De l'Utile et de l'Honnête.'

observation, or drawn by some attractive force in the cat.'[1]

It is, however, when we come to his study of man that we find Montaigne at his boldest.

'The laws of conscience that we say are born of nature are really born of custom,' he writes—'Every man holdeth in veneration the opinions and morals approved and received by those around him, nor can he depart from them without remorse, nor practise them without self-applause.'[2]

If Montaigne had been made to be a martyr, his whole conception of natural law might well have brought him to the stake. His nonchalance saved him—that and the form of the Essay, which covered heresies so carelessly and colloquially that no one discovered them.

'It is probable,' he says, 'that the chief credit of miracles, of visions, and spells, and such abnormal effects, hath its source in the power of imagination, acting principally upon the minds of the vulgar, the which are softer than others. Their belief has been so strongly got hold of, that they think they see what

1 *Essais*, i. 20: 'De la Force de l'Imagination.'

2 *Essais*, i. 22: 'De la coutume et de ne changer aisément une loi reçue.'

they do not see.'[1] . . . 'There are some who ascribe the scars of King Dagobert and of St. Francis to the strength of the imagination.'[2]

'Miracles exist according to our ignorance of nature, not according to nature's true being. Custom drugs the sap of our judgment. Savages are no more wonderful to us than we to them, nor with better cause—as every one would acknowledge, if, after letting his mind rove among all these new specimens, he knew how to come home and look at the things he found there, and order them sanely. Human reason is a dye, coloured in about equal proportion by all our opinions and moralities, whatever shape they assume: infinite in matter, infinite in variety.'[3]

But the resistance of man's reason to miracles is not to be made a source of pride. He does not forget to hit the 'superior' person. If he allows that the 'vulgar' are more credulous, he hastens to assure us that the vices of credulity are preferable to those of incredulity.

'Children and vulgar folk, and women, and sick people are apter to be led by the nose. But then, on the other hand, it is a foolish presumption to go scorning and condemning

[1] *Essais*, i. 20: 'De la force de l'Imagination.' [2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Essais*, i. 22: 'De la coutume et de ne changer aisément une loi reçue.'

as false that which doth not seem probable to ourselves. This is a vice which is common among those who think that they have some kind of competence above the ordinary. . . . Nor has experience ever shown me anything higher than my first beliefs—no blame to my curiosity. But reason has taught me that thus resolutely to condemn a thing as false and impossible is to give oneself the privilege of laying down in one's head set limits to the will of God and the power of our mother, Nature; and there is no more notable folly in the world than to reduce these to the measurements of our capacities and our sufficiency.'[1]

'We must not judge of that which is possible or impossible according to what is credible to our senses.'[2]

'What we call monsters are not such to God, Who seeth in the immensity of His handiwork the infinity of forms the which He hath comprised therein. From His All-Wisdom proceedeth nothing but what is good, and common, and lawful; but we see neither the order nor the relation of what is created.'[3]

[1] *Essais*, i. 27: 'C'est folie de rapporter le vrai et le faux à notre suffisance.'

[2] *Essais*, ii. 32: 'Défence de Sénèque et de Plutarque.'

[3] *Essais*, ii. 30: 'D'un enfant monstrueux.'

Here, again, peeps out his aversion to the pedant, to whatever pretence divides any man from the high-road and the common herd. It is curious to find this kind of democratic notion in two of the greatest conservatives the world has produced—in Shakespeare and in Montaigne. It was born of their passion for the obvious and their hatred of presumption, natural perhaps to minds so greatly sane in that day of the late Renaissance when intellectual pride had led men into decadent depths of vice, and the rich lived hedged in by an insolent state. For though Shakespeare and Montaigne were both of them aristocrats at heart, they were even more strongly humourists, and much though both disliked the mob, they disliked pomp and circumstance still more. And both of them loved, or believed they loved, the poor and humble, though perhaps what they really loved was poverty, because they thought that it meant simplicity.

But here Montaigne, at least, was guilty of a great fallacy, and one which falsifies a good deal of his thought. In confounding poverty with simplicity, and crudeness with sincerity, he made much the same mistake as Rousseau. Each advocated a return to Nature, and each took nature and naturalness to mean the same

thing. They dreamed that the presence of artificial conditions was responsible for human depravity.

'We have abandoned Nature,' says Montaigne, 'we wish ourselves to teach her her lessons—to her who led us so happily and so safely. Our wisdom might from the very beasts get the most useful knowledge concerning the greatest, most essential functions of our life: we might learn how to live, to die, to manage our property, to love and to educate our children, and to maintain justice.'[1]

Even Rousseau would not have wished little Émile to be brought up like the young of the lion, but then Montaigne and Rousseau chose different representatives of their ideal state. Rousseau, the eighteenth-century idyllist, transformed the peasant; Montaigne, the Renaissance discoverer, transformed the savage. It was not that Montaigne did not admire peasants; we have seen that his infancy was passed with them, and in his own scheme of education he warmly advocated the cultivation of their habits. But the savage appealed to him. He had talked to two aborigines at Rouen, to others, doubtless, on occasion, yet the real savage was as unknown to him as the real

[1] *Essais*, iii. 12: 'De la Physionomie.'

peasant to Rousseau. Both peasant and savage were in the air of their respective centuries: Rousseau's peasants, because men were sated with pleasure and civilisation and demanded something new to revive them; Montaigne's savages, because his generation had grown corrupted by old institutions and by book-learning, because, worn with civil war and schism, it was easy to lay the blame on systems and functionaries, and to imagine that the absence of such evils would bring the longed-for peace and prosperity. Yet it is strange to compare Montaigne's usual caution with his anarchic Utopia. Because he scorned the fripperies of the law, and savages have no magistrates, he leaped to the conclusion that their condition was the perfect one. His great essay, *Des Cannibales*, is full of such arguments—not casuistries like those of the *Contrat Social*, but naïve, almost childish blunders.

'Those who return from that New World which was discovered in the time of our fathers can bear me witness that these people, without laws or magistrates, live far more lawfully and regularly than we do here, where there are more officials than there are other men, and more laws than there are actions.'[1]

[1] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

And, again, he uses his aborigines as weapons against prudery, conceit, and provincialism.

'Now,' he says, 'to come back to my subject, I find, by all reports, that this race showeth no trace of savagery or barbarism—unless every man calleth barbarism that to which he is not accustomed; and, in truth, it seemeth that we have no other mirror of truth and reason than the example of the views and usages of the country in which we live.

'There we have always the perfect religion, the perfect government, the perfect and accomplished administration of all things. . . . But this race of which I speak . . . is one which hath no kind of commerce; no knowledge of letters; no science of numbers; no title of magistrate or of any political superiority; no tradition of service; of riches or of poverty; no contracts; no successions; no partition of possessions; no occupations excepting idle ones; no respect of relationship, save what is common; no clothing; no agriculture; no metal; no use of wine or corn. . . . There is nothing so very bad in all this. But, then, they wear no tops to their breeches.'[1]

A return to Nature is always the return of

[1] *Essais*, i. 31: 'Des Cannibales.'

the Prodigal, and the setting up the savage or the peasant as the type of perfection is a form of disgust with corruption. But Montaigne meant something more than this—something of far deeper significance. He is tilting against the human intellect — against its presumptions, its duperies, its disillusionment, its failure to help or guide mankind, its impotence in the face of life and death. And he was answered. For it seems as if, for once, we may believe with some show of certainty that Shakespeare rose to hold the brief for the mind and for civilised man. It is well known that the last quoted passage (for which reason we have used Florio's words in the version which Shakespeare used) was the passage which he reproduced in Gonzalo's famous speech in the *Tempest*,[1] — words which show that he had been reading 'Concerning Cannibals.' And Caliban is his

[1] I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation; all men idle, all;
And women too; but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty. . . .

answer—his laughing answer, most think—to Montaigne. But there is grave irony below the mirth. Montaigne accuses the white man of depraving the wise and innocent savage. Prospero desired to transform the life of bestial discomfort until he found that his efforts were of no use. It was not the princely Prospero who affected Caliban; it was Trinculo and Stephano, the scum of their kind, the nearest to him, who made him their creature through the bottle. The play seems to hover round the question of conquered natives, of the conqueror's rights, of the good he can do; but it would appear that Shakespeare meant even more than that. Intellect, Montaigne says, is vanity: Shakespeare created Prospero. We should not dare, says Montaigne, to meddle with our fellow-men; there is no such thing as an inferior race; where we think to bring order, we bring vice. Prospero takes possession of the island; he discovers and uses its resources; he discovers and uses Caliban—he

> All things in common nature should produce
> Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony,
> Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
> Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,
> Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
> To feed my innocent people.
>
> *Tempest*, Act ii. Scene 1.

does not torture him. Caliban hates him as he was bound to hate his superior, but Prospero subjugates him — as he subjugates Trinculo and Stephano, and the base conspirators, and the very elements—by his mind, his vast, creating mind. May it be that the contrast drawn between Ferdinand's noble love and his endurance of Prospero's hard test, with Caliban's ugly passion for Miranda, is Shakespeare's answer to Montaigne's 'no respect of relationship save what is in common'? At any rate, it is to the disembodied Ariel, the spirit of imagination, the minister to his intellect, that Prospero gives the best reward he has to give—freedom.

Montaigne, like all great geniuses, is inconsistent. His conception of Nature necessarily includes his practical conception of natural ties, apart from aboriginal Edens or the ideal example of the animals. We might expect to find his general notions in accordance with these instances, but not at all. No purely natural bond is to count. 'Father and son,' he says, 'may be of widely different temperaments, and brothers also. This is my son, this is my parent, but he is a surly man or an unkind one, or a fool! Besides, in proportion as these friendships are commanded to us by

law and by natural obligation, so much the less have they of our individual choice and free-will.'[1] 'Voluntary friendship,' he reiterates, 'is the only tie worth possessing. The passion of love is nothing beside it—and no marriage can be happy unless imitating it.'[2] 'A happy marriage, if such there be, refuses the company of love.'[3] And he is just as untrue to Nature in his comparison of the sexes: 'I say that male and female are cast in the same mould; saving for custom and institution, the difference between them is not great.'[4] And this is said by a despiser of woman as he had found her. But his inconsistencies are not as mysterious as they look. They are due to the same cause—his feeling for La Boétie. It is the personal note that interferes with his logic — the higher strain in him which is speaking. For him, friendship had made all other intercourse seem stale —he would esteem none but this. Neither his wife nor his daughter had much chance with him. Even had they been different, they would have found it hard to satisfy him,

[1] *Essais*, i. 28: 'De l'Amitié.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 5: 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*

for his natural affections were the weakest of his instincts. Love was in his eyes mere dissipation, a something to be used and thrown away; and in the relations of the sexes he could only see indiscriminate licence—a predestined havoc and warfare. 'There is,' he says, 'a natural feud, a fray, between us and them [women]; the closest agreement that we have with them is none the less turbulent and stormy.'[1] There he comes back to one of his true visions of Nature. He does not hold her up for imitation, he simply states her. And far from blaming, he never criticises her. To him she is the fertilising force of life, and must be accepted altogether. Good and bad are not words in his vocabulary any more than in hers: he only has advisable and inadvisable. Judicially, relentlessly, disinterestedly, he passes in review all the vices and vagaries of vice to which she has subjected mortal man, but his comments are no more than those of an expert who says what is safe and what is harmful. And throughout he never swerves from his allegiance—he remains Nature's subject, Nature's champion.

His championship is never quite so splendid as when he takes arms against asceticism. It

[1] *Essais*, iii. 5: 'Sur des vers de Virgile.'

was to him, one more, an all-important form of arrogance and pedantry, the setting up of man's will against the gods.

'Nature not being herself, compels the mind to suffer with the body,' says Shakespeare in *King Lear*. 'All these things,' says Montaigne, 'may be accounted for by that narrow seam between mind and body, which twain do intercommunicate their fortunes.'[1] And it is on this 'narrow seam' that he is always dwelling. 'As for me,' he says, 'who only deal with common earth, I hate this inhuman wisdom which tries to make us scorners and enemies of all care of the body. In my judgment, it is quite as unjust to entertain a dislike of natural passions as to embrace them too closely.'[2]

When Montaigne touches upon the exact relations of mind and matter, he reaches almost his highest level. His loathing of the mischief the monks had wrought, of all hypocrisies and furbelows—his power of looking Nature straight in the face, of admiring a spade for being a spade — and his firm determination never to separate spirit from the senses, give his utterances a kind of intense sanity. He

[1] *Essais*, i. 20: 'De la force de l'Imagination.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'

proclaims what Rabelais proclaimed before him, what Browning proclaimed after him, the absolute interdependence of body and soul —the inability of either to live or work wholesomely without the other—the ruin that results from their separation. And in one passage, at least, he allows the mastery of the soul. But that passage must not mislead us. Because Montaigne's favourite subject warmed him into fervid speech, and worked upon that higher quality which existed within him, we must not be persuaded to imagine that his import was, like that of Browning, the spiritual evolution of man. Even in the fine sentences below, he is recognising the soul rather as the protector of the body's interests than as the lord of her destiny. And what he makes for all along is to demonstrate the evil due to the soul's neglect of the body, not that which results from the body's neglect of the soul. This would have been a process with which his common sense would have felt sympathy, but he hardly takes it into account. There is, however, no need to do more than let him speak for himself, to take a few out of the reiterated utterances that he has left us on the subject.

'Those do wrong who wish to disjoin our

two great halves, and isolate them one from the other. They should, on the contrary, be joined and re-united. The soul must be commanded not to draw aside, to keep itself apart, to despise and desert the body—indeed, it cannot possibly do so excepting through some ill-shaped apish trick. Rather should the soul strike fresh alliance with the body, embrace it, cherish it, control and counsel it, re-establish it and bring it back when it swerveth. In short, the soul should marry the body and serve it as a husband, to the end that their property should not appear to be different and contrary, but one and the same.'[1]

'Nature is a pleasing guide. . . . I seek out her track wherever I go: we have blurred it with artificial footprints. For[illegible] reason do we dismember and tear asu[illegible] parts of an edifice built of mas[illegible] cemented? Let us rather re[illegible] dint of mutual services; let [illegible] and vivify the heaviness o[illegible] body check and fix the light[illegible] There is no part of us unw[illegible] our [illegible] in this gift which God ha[illegible]n us. the last hair, we owe Him an account of [illegible] And this order which biddeth him admin[illegible]ist

[1] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'

his human nature according to its estate is no order of discharge; it is an express commission, simple, very essential, and the Creator has charged us with it seriously and severely.'[1]

'Between ourselves I have constantly observed that there are two things which, strange to say, always go together: super-celestial feeling and subterranean morals. Such as dwell on the soul apart from the body design to get beyond themselves and escape from humanity. It is folly; instead of transforming themselves into angels, they transform themselves into beasts.'[2]

'I find nothing so mortal in the life of Alexander as his fancies concerning immortality.'[3]

'Tha[illegible]ion which disdaineth our natural [illegible]us, for, after all, our life is our [illegible] It is against Nature that we [illegible]urselves and set ourselves not [illegible]urselves. This is a peculiar [illegible]er creature is known to hate [illegible] and it is for a like vanity [illegible] we de[illegible] different from what we are.'[4] The 'd[illegible]' the supernatural, was to

[1] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'
[2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Essais*, ii. 3: 'Coutume de l'Ile de Céa.'

Montaigne always mere foolishness—'fancies concerning immortality'—and his prejudice was enhanced by his strong sense of the unity of Nature. 'It is ever,' he says, 'one and the same Nature who rolleth on her course. He who hath thoroughly learned to know her estate in the present can safely conclude therefrom all the future and all the past.'[1]

But who, according to Montaigne, has 'learned to know her estate in the present'? This brings us to his attitude towards human knowledge and to the worth which he set upon it. His views were no new ones; they are shared by the author of Ecclesiastes, by all the saints and all the cynics. They are diametrically opposed to those of Rabelais. Montaigne disbelieved in intellect as much as Rabelais believed in it. Yet for its academical professors, for pundits and bigwigs, Rabelais nourished as sarcastic an aversion as his successor. Who can forget the law-officers and the Schoolmen in *Pantagruel*? But he was idealist enough to win through their fogs and follies; to see that they were the abusers of knowledge, not its representatives; to apprehend, like Shakespeare, the glorious possibilities of mind. The concrete Mon-

1 *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

taigne judged knowledge too much by the knowers, and the knowers exasperated him. His annoyance entered into his valuation of man's powers, though other elements were there besides, chief among them a large pessimistic modesty which coloured many of his verdicts. Once more we find the old refrain. He regards presumption and pedantry as the two arch-enemies to real knowledge, and to these he seems to see no end as long as the world goes on. He did not become a sceptic, he was born one, and so, innocent of any intellectual process, he gave no name to the result and was able to tack on to his free-thought any form of orthodoxy that he chose.

'It is only the fools who are certain and decided.' [1]

'He who wishes to be cured of ignorance must confess it.' [2]

'We put out our arms to embrace everything, but we only clasp the wind.' [3]

'We condemn all that seemeth strange to us and all that we do not understand.' [4]

These four sayings give us the keynote of Montaigne's thought. And his attitude

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 11: 'Des Boiteux.'
[3] *Essais*, i. 31: 'Des Cannibales.'
[4] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

towards religious services was significant of his scorn of the human intellect. The comprehension of words could only harm men and sow the seeds of arrogance. He mistook mystification for mystery, and believed it would have the same effect.

'Droll people' (he says of the translators of the Bible), 'who think that they have made it fit for the use of the people by putting it into popular language. Is it only because of the words that they do not understand all that they find written? I could say more. By bringing them this inch nearer to the Word, they have taken them farther away.'[1] . . . 'Nothing is so firmly believed as that which is least known.'[2]

So much for the common congregation. The preachers and the thinkers had their turn.

'And to these' (pretentious persons), 'did I dare, I would gladly join a crowd of people, the interpreters and controllers-in-ordinary of the designs of God, who profess to discover the causes of every accident and to detect in the secrets of the Divine Will the incomprehensible motives of His works. . . . Hard it

[1] *Essais*, i. 56: 'Des Prières.'

[2] *Essais*, i. 32: 'Qu'il faut sobrement se mêler de juger des ordonnances divines.'

is, indeed, to bring down things divine to be weighed in our scales, without finding that they have suffered debasement. . . . We must be content with the light which it pleaseth the sun to impart to us through its rays. And whosoever would lift his eyes to take into himself a greater draught thereof, let him not think it strange if, as a penalty for his arrogance, he should lose his sight.'[1]

'For why should not a goose speak thus: every part of the universe concerneth me. The earth serveth for me to walk upon, the sun to light me, the stars to exhale their influences upon me. I get this use from the winds, that from the waters; there is nothing that the vault of heaven looketh upon so favourably as myself. I am the darling of Nature. Is it not man who nourisheth me, and lodgeth me, and serveth me? It is for me that he causeth sowing and grinding. If he eateth me, he also doth the same by his fellow-man; and even so do I eat the worms which kill and devour him.'[2] 'We do right when we set the tightest barriers that we can round the human mind. In its studies,

[1] *Essais*, i. 32: 'Qu'il faut sobrement se mêler de juger des ordonnances divines.'

[2] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

as elsewhere, we must count, we must regulate its steps.'[1]

'Whosoever seeketh something, he cometh at last to this point: either that he saith he hath found it; or that it cannot be found; or that it is still being sought for. All philosophy is divided into these three kinds.'[2] 'It can with truth be said that first there is the primal A B C kind of ignorance which precedeth knowledge, then the professional ignorance which followeth upon knowledge, the which this same knowledge maketh and engendereth, just as she maketh and destroyeth the first kind.'[3]

'We are not,' he concludes, 'as full of evil as of inanity.'[4] This admission (reminding us of Anatole France's 'tender contempt' for his kind) is the utmost measure of indulgence that he vouchsafes us. And what is the conclusion of the whole matter?

'If it be true that man, alone of all the animals, hath this liberty of imagination, showeth this disordered tangle of thoughts, figuring to him that which is, that which is not, and that which he desireth, whether it be

[1] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Essais*, i. 54: 'Des vaines subtilités.
[4] *Essais*, i. 50: 'De Democritus et Heraclitus.'

true or false—then it is a privilege the which he buyeth dear, and whereof he hath little cause to boast. For from it there springeth the main source of the evils which press upon him—sin, disease, irresolution, agitation, despair. I repeat, then, that we have no reason to believe that the animals do by natural and compelling instinct the same things that we do from choice and industry. From like effects we ought to deduce like faculties . . . and so to confess that this same understanding, this same ground that we cling to as of our own peculiar tillage, is also possessed by the animals—that, or, indeed, some better region. Why should we imagine them to be bound by natural constraint, we who feel no such effect in ourselves? Besides which . . . it were safer to leave the reins in Nature's hands than in our own. It is the vanity of our presumption that maketh us like to owe our competency to our own strength, rather than to God's liberality.'[1]

In understanding, then, we are lower than the animals, as well as in virtue lower than the savages. Is it only an encouraging fancy that here again Shakespeare has answered Montaigne? Florio's translation of the *Essays*

[1] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

was published for the first time in 1603, and 1603 is the date to which the authorities ascribe the completed version of *Hamlet*.[1]

Shakespeare, we know, read *Florio*; what is more, he probably met him, for Florio was tutor to the Earl of Southampton, and also the friend of Ben Jonson, and the appearance of the *Essays* in England must have been an event of importance. The passage last quoted comes out of the longest and most essential of all Montaigne's *Essays*—the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond'—the confession of his own belief, or disbelief. Now let us listen to the well-worn words of Hamlet.

'What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!'

The contrast is the more marked that Hamlet, in the mood of the deepest disgust with life, is only meditating on man's glories to contrast them with his mortality—with

[1] Although it is pretty certain that the play had existed in some form a year or two earlier, it is equally true that Florio's book was entered in the Stationers' Register for 1599. While Shakespeare was at work upon *Hamlet*, he could therefore easily have read *Florio* in manuscript.

the end of 'this quintessence of dust.' But that does not affect his view of man's possibilities. To Shakespeare, man is the paragon of the animals; to Montaigne, the animal is the paragon of man. Hamlet's pessimism overshadows his life—it is the pessimism of disillusionment, he can see no horizon. Montaigne's pessimism, born with him, is always cheerful; he thinks little of men so long as they amuse him. The present is the only tense worth having; the good of life is unattainable; let us make for the attainable—daily comfort.

But when Montaigne speaks of the vanity of knowledge, he often uses 'knowledge' for 'learning,' and even the 'learned' for the learners. What he means is that he regards that knowledge as contemptible which packs the head with useless matter, and he called most things useless which could not be directly applied to daily existence. Thought for thought's sake he abhorred, but for practical wisdom he had great reverence.

'Simple peasants,' he says, 'are honest folk, and honest folk, too, are the philosophers, or rather (according to the utterance of our day), they should not be called philosophers, but men of strong and lucid natures, enriched by

a wide study of the useful sciences. The middle folk who despise the first stage, the ignorance of letters, and have not got as far as the other . . . are dangerous, inept, importunate; they disturb the world.'[1]

Among the 'middle folk' he put professors of learning — pedagogues, schoolmen, theologians, *savants*. Never is his eye more true, or his wit more trenchant than when he uses it to hit them. 'If you have mistaken one of the Scipios for the other, what can you still say that has any value? According to them, he who doth not know about Aristotle knoweth nothing about himself.'[2] And his sayings are more than brilliant irony; they are of deep and serious import. He arraigns his victims as guilty of some of the chief evils of human existence. 'For the most part the causes of the troubles of the world are made by the grammarians,[3] he says. 'Difficulty is the coin that the learned use, like conjurers, so that they may not reveal the inanity of their art—a coin which human stupidity easily accepts as payment.'[4]

Words have not only made quarrels, they

[1] *Essais*, i. 54: 'Des vaines subtilités.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'
[3] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.' [4] *Ibid.*

have made traditions ; and traditions have made conventional people who depend upon others for their thoughts and opinions. 'Whoso followeth another, followeth nothing.'[1]

'We pay heed to the opinions and the knowledge of others, and that is all. We ought to make these things our own. . . . We lean so heavily upon the arms of others that we annihilate our own strength. Do I wish to steel myself against the fear of death? I do so at the expense of Seneca. Do I wish to get consolation for myself, or for another? I borrow it from Cicero. I should have drawn it from myself had I been exercised in the art of so doing. I do not like this begged and borrowed sufficiency.[2]

'We know how to say, Cicero speaks thus ; these are the words of Plato ; these the very words of Aristotle. But we, what do we say of ourselves? What are our judgments? What do we do?'[3]

'Our souls only move on the credit system, bound and constrained by the wills of other men's caprices, enslaved and imprisoned beneath the yoke of other men's teaching. I

1 *Essais*, i. 26 : 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
2 *Essais*, i. 25 : 'Du Pédantisme.'
3 *Ibid.*

used to see, privily, at Pisa, a worthy man, but such an Aristotelian that the widest of his dogmas was this: that the test and rule of all solid imaginations and all truth was conformity to the doctrines of Aristotle—that outside them we find only dreams and inanity —that he has seen everything and said all that there is to say.'[1]

'I know people like the man who, if I inquire of him what he knoweth, asketh for a book that he may show me.'[2] 'What a tedious cleverness is purely bookish cleverness!'[3] 'We know how to decline virtue even though we do not live it.'[4] 'If you should call out concerning one who passeth in the street, "Oh, what a learned man!" and, concerning another, "Oh, what a good man!" you would find that every one will turn their eyes and their respect towards the former. A third shouter would be wanted to shout out, "Oh, the blockheads!" We eagerly ask, "Doth he know Greek or Latin? Doth he write in verse or prose?" but the important matter is whether he hath grown wiser or

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
[2] *Essais*, i. 25: 'Du Pédantisme.'
[3] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
[4] *Essais*, ii. 17: 'De la Présomption.'

better, and the answer to that lags behind. We ought to ask who knoweth best, not who knoweth most.'[1]

Traditions also make certain names into shibboleths and certain processes into unwritten laws; they exalt particular kinds of people till—the worst crime in Montaigne's eyes—they think themselves different from *les autres.*

'A mind richly stored with knowledge of many things doth not therefore become more alive or more awake, and a common mind of coarse fibre can harbour, without refining itself, the same views and judgments as the best minds that the earth has borne.'[2]

'One sees the peasant and the cobbler go their ways candidly and simply, talking of what they know, while these others because they want to puff and be-police themselves with the learning that floats about in the shallows of their brains, flounder along without a pause, stumbling, and clogging themselves.'[3] 'I see men . . . who *pontificate* even on their hearths and in their own insides, dragging the pomp of office into their very

[1] *Essais*, i. 25: 'Du Pédantisme.'
[2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

dressing-closets. I cannot teach them to distinguish the cappings and bowings given to themselves, from those that are due to their functions or their suite or their mules. The mayor and Montaigne have always been two persons—and most clearly divided.'[1]

'It is for the stupid to look down from a platform upon other men—for ever to return from the fight, self-satisfied and full of vain-glory.'[2] That is the note to which Montaigne always returns—one could quote on continuously. The intellect is nowhere as an asset in life; it deceives us as to our real nature; it makes us aspire to be better than we can be, and this sows in us the seed of pride and discontent, preventing us, too, from getting the enjoyment that we might get from our actual condition: the natural ease, the comfortable pleasures, which the poor and stupid know how to appreciate. It may be argued that Montaigne's practice was different from his preaching, that he passed his days among his books, reading poetry and philosophy. But he had a case. He might have answered us something after this fashion: 'I read only to please myself, not for profit or

[1] *Essais*, iii. 10: 'De ménager sa volonté.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 8: 'De l'Art de conférer.'

for any pretence of learning. The use to which I put my studies is a practical one—the formation of character for the exigences of life as we find it. That use I respect, and, for that reason, my favourite and most thumbed volumes are the *Lives of Plutarch* and the works of Seneca.' He could not be quite consistent, he was too big for that, but in the main his answer would be a true one. 'Learn to live,' is the only lesson he cares to give us—not to live nobly, but to live adaptably, to live cheerfully.

'The great, the glorious masterpiece achievable by man is to live *à propos*. It is the small souls, buried below the weight of their business, who are not able to throw it off, to leave it there and then resume it.'[1]

And it is these '*âmelettes*,' stunted and sickly, who are Montaigne's aversion, because they do not know how to live. They belong to two sorts—to the fools and to the pedants; to the fools, because 'nothing irritates me so much in foolishness as the fact that it is more pleased with itself than any reason could reasonably be';[2] to the pedants, for all the

[1] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 8: 'De l'Art de conférer.'

causes he has already given us — with one added :

'To how many human beings in my time has a cold and taciturn countenance acted as a pass to a reputation for prudence and capacity.'[1]

And what is the best school in which to learn how to live? Life, replies Montaigne, is the only school. 'Man gets wonderful light for his judgment by frequenting the world of men. We are all confined and huddled up within ourselves, and cut our vision short according to the length of our noses.'[2] Before we learn anything else, we must learn to get rid of self-importance. 'In this school of intercourse with men, I have often noticed this vice—that instead of gaining information about others, we labour only to give it about ourselves, and take more pains to make profit out of our old wares than to acquire new ones . . . . Let us fly from this puerile ambition to appear to be more subtle than our kind, merely so as to seem different from them and win reputation by our fastidiousness and our whim-whams.'[3]

[1] *Essais*, iii. 8 : 'De l'Art de conférer.' Compare La Rochefoucauld : 'La gravité est un mystère du corps qui cache souvent l'absence de l'esprit.'

[2] *Essais*, i. 26 : 'De l'Institution des Enfants.' [3] *Ibid.*

When we have mastered this elementary science of modesty, taught always by Montaigne through the head and not the heart—for the heart is a factor he leaves out—we shall have a chance of gaining other knowledge. Our minds once empty of all learning, we shall be fit to get wisdom.

'As plants are choked by too much moisture, and lamps by too much oil, so the action of the mind is choked by too much stuff of study, the which so blocks it up that . . . it loses the faculty of mixing. . . . But without this, all is different, for the more the mind is filled, the more space it possesseth.'[1]

And when the mind fills and widens, what is the final fruit we gather?

'There hath happened to the people of real knowledge what happeneth to ears of corn. As long as they are empty, they go on growing high and lifting up their heads straight and proud; but when they are full, and swelled with ripened grain, they begin to humble themselves and to bow their spikes. Likewise men, having tried all things, sounded all things, and having found in this heap of science nothing solid and massive, nothing, indeed, but vanity, altogether renounce their

[1] *Essais*, i. 25: 'Du Pédantisme.'

presumption and recognise their natural condition.'[1]

Humility is their harvest — intellectual humility, which equips them for the task of living sanely. But oftenest they do not get this art till long experience has imparted it. 'We are taught to live when life is past,' says Montaigne—yet 'a child when it first leaveth its nurse is much more capable of learning this lesson than of learning to read or write.'[2]

But it is never too late to begin, as it is never too early. 'We may at all times continue to study, but not to sit in school,'[3] he says, he who had sat as short a time in school as was possible. Nevertheless, education was one of the subjects on which he had thought most, and about which he had written one of his fullest and finest essays, *De l'Institution des Enfants*. It was dedicated to Madame de Grammont, for the child that was to be born, and enforces, as we might expect, a bold programme, at least two hundred years ahead of its day. It is easy from the foregoing quotations to understand what Montaigne's final aim would be in this direction. Any

[1] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'
[2] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
[3] *Essais*, ii. 28: 'Toutes choses ont leur saison.'

child about whom he concerned himself was to have no special education in this study or that, but he was to be trained as an efficient human being. No pedant, no man of jargon, was to come near him ; he was to be taught by men of the world how to observe and to perceive, and, fresh from the hand of chosen tutors, he was to enter the University of Life.

'Now for this apprenticeship, everything we chance to see serveth us as an all-sufficient book ; the malice of a page, the folly of a footman, a topic at table, all these make so much new matter for experience. . . . And he [the lad who is being educated] will be told that, when he is in company, he must have his eyes everywhere at once. Generally the best seats at the dinner-table are seized, I find, by people of inferior intelligence . . . and I have watched men sitting at the high end of the table talking on about the beauty of a hanging, or the taste of the *Malvoisie*, and missing excellent stories at the lower end. He should sound the depths of every one he meeteth. Bullock-breeder, stone-mason, passer-by—he must get something from each and all, and borrow from every one according to his wares, for there is nothing that doth not come in useful for a household ; the very

follies and foibles of others will serve him for instruction. . . . A closet, a garden, the table, his bed, solitude, society, morning, evening—all hours will be one to him, every place will be to him a study.'[1]

We cannot but feel that young Shakespeare —keen to act in the fray, as well as to look on and make his profit—would have plucked more of the heart from the bullock-breeder than Montaigne with his busy curiosity. But the knowledge that comes of sympathy was not given to him, nor did he desire it. And he never recommends it to old or young. The young, however, are to have the wish to please.

Thus much he says for what might be called the University training of youth. But the years of childhood and early boyhood come before this, and Montaigne does not leave these aside. Nor does he wish, as we might logically expect, that these years should be passed in pure ignorance. Far from it. He becomes delightfully personal and inconsistent. His own training, he tells us, was never thorough; he remembered nothing but 'a vague and shapeless countenance of knowledge: a little of everything and nothing of anything, *à la française*.' And he proceeds to

1 *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'

draw up a captivating scheme of education. It is not so illogical either. For when we look into it more closely, we shall find that his plans all help his final end and bear upon the conduct of life.

The New Learning, the re-discovery of the classics, had given fresh impetus to education, and educational treatises were in vogue. The Humanists were very fond of writing them, and dull enough they usually are. Happily Rabelais wrote one too: his letter of counsel to Gargantua, on the bringing-up of Prince Pantagruel, is one of the noblest discourses that has ever been printed on the subject. It is nobler than the utterances of Montaigne, because it is warmed by fire from the heart, not only by light from the head. Yet different roads make for the same goals. No one who has read it is likely to forget Rabelais' glorious morning scamper of wit—his dissertation, his exuberant tilting against the Sorbonne and the Schoolmen. One he is also with Montaigne in his splendid pursuit of sincerity—his insistence that, from the outset, human beings must learn to think for themselves. But where Rabelais trumpets, Montaigne speaks. We are not deafened by noise and by laughter; we can hear, and hear well.

And where Rabelais tells a fable, Montaigne has no disguise. He speaks to us direct, without distraction. Besides, if Rabelais goes deeper, Montaigne is more modern, not only in his ideas, but in the way he expresses them. In his conceptions of indulgent discipline, of scientific methods, of knowledge without tears, he is centuries in front of himself: nearer to Maria Edgeworth and Goethe's ideal school in *Wilhelm Meister*, than to Rabelais and Pantagruel; near, too, in his notions of hygiene, of simple life and hardy habits, to the *Émile* of Rousseau. Montaigne really went beyond them all—not, perhaps, in the things he made for first, but in giving them the first place. Rousseau, Goethe, Miss Edgeworth, made for the same ends, but these were involved and hidden in other issues: with Rousseau in the emotions; with Goethe in moral processes; with Miss Edgeworth in the dialectics of schoolroom reason. Montaigne had no wrappings.

'There is no help for it,' he says; 'whoso desireth for certain to make an efficient man, he must in nowise spare him in his youth. He must often shock professors and all their rules.'[1] 'Let divers judgments be set before

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'

him [the child]; he will choose, if he can. If not, he will remain in doubt.'[1] These two adages are the central truths of Montaigne's system. But he also gives two negative ordinances. The teacher must, above all, avoid scholasticism, he must avoid severity. 'I disapprove,' writes Montaigne, 'of any violence in the education of a tender spirit, the which one traineth up to honour and to liberty. There is I know not what of servility in restriction and in rigour, and I believe that what cannot be wrought by reason and good sense can never be brought about by force. . . . I should always try by sweet-tempered converse to nourish in my children a living friendship and unfeigned kindness towards myself ; and these one gaineth easily from well-born natures.'[2] 'There is nothing like tickling the appetite and the affection [for learning]; otherwise one only creates donkeys loaded with books. They are well thrashed to keep their little panniers full of knowledge. But to get knowledge truly, we must not only give her lodging within us, we must marry her.'[3]

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'
[2] *Essais*, ii. 8: 'De l'Affection des pères aux enfants.'
[3] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'

Spare the rod and the child will not be spoilt—and so back again to the arch-enemy. Pedagogues alone have made learning disagreeable. Montaigne remembers his own childhood. 'They never ceased to scream in one's ears as if they were pouring something into a barrel and one's task was only to repeat what was told one. I should like to see all this kind of thing mended, and to make a teacher begin at once according to the reach of the mind he has to handle—to put a child on the alert, impelling him to taste and discern things and to choose from among them for himself, sometimes opening a way for him, sometimes letting him find it. I do not wish the teacher alone to talk and to invent; I want him to hear his disciple talk in *his* turn. . . . It is the sign of a high soul, and a strong one, to know how to condescend to the ways of children and to guide them. One's step is more at home on one's own hillside than in the valley below.'[1]

The perfect teacher, then, must know how to be a child. Montaigne, as far as we know, was the first person to discover that truth. And the next important thing to grasp is how to

[1] *Essais*, i. 26; 'De l'Institution des Enfants.'

make lessons living. Wisdom, he says, should have a smiling face.

'It is very wrong to paint her as inaccessible to children, of a shrewish countenance, bushy-eyebrowed and terrible. Who has given her this false, pale, hideous mask? There is nothing gayer, or more gallant, or more frolic—I was almost going to say rollicking. For she preacheth nought but feasting and good times.'[1]

Wisdom must be taught by means of history. 'Here I mean to include (and that chiefly) such men as only live because books remember them. By means of history, he [the teacher] will deal with these great spirits of the best ages. It is, if you like, a vain study; but if you like, also, it is a study the which beareth priceless fruit.... And may the guide remember whither his work really tendeth! Nor must he take such pains to impress upon his pupil the date of the ruin of Carthage, as the manner of man that Hannibal was, or Scipio.'[2] If this be done, the child (or, as Montaigne points out, about one child in a hundred) will grow wise. He may forget; the body of fact may decay; but the soul of knowledge will remain, and all else is worthless.

'For if his spirit gaineth no better balance,

[1] *Essais*, i. 26: 'De l'Institution des Enfants.' [2] *Ibid.*

if his judgment be no saner, I had as lief that my scholar had passed his time in playing at tennis—at least his body would then be the brisker. For he who should bring back a full soul from learning doth in this way but bring it back stuffed ; he hath but swollen it instead of making it larger.'[1] Pretences, indeed, weaken the mind, as too many clothes weaken the body. Sincerity is strength. And to fashion character, to hammer it into shape, is the one important goal of the educator. 'I would rather forge my soul than furnish it,'[2] Montaigne wrote of himself—he wished young spirits to be forged before they were furnished.

The sources of help which Montaigne used for this forging of his soul do not seem far to seek. For he found them chiefly in himself. The sense of religion was not natural to him. And yet here, in a sense, he is puzzling. His confession of faith, 'L'Apologie de Raimond Sebond,' which makes a pamphlet in itself, does not at first sight fit in with the rest of him. But it is only at first sight. If we probe farther into his meaning, we shall find that in the main he is the same. And what he is, the passages from the *Essays* have

[1] *Essais*, i. 25 : 'Du Pédantisme.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 3 : 'De trois Commerces.'

already shown us. At his best he is a Pagan sceptic — a happy sceptic — at his worst a colloquial opportunist, naked and rather unashamed.

'I am not,' he said, 'subject to these intimate and piercing pledge-givings and mortgagings of my soul. . . . I would follow the good cause to the stake, and the fire, but not into it if I could help it. Let Montaigne leap into the abyss if there be need, but if there be no need I shall be most beholden to Fortune if he can get off.[1] . . .

'I say nothing to one that at the right hour I cannot say to the other, only with the accent a little changed.'[2]

And if our convictions do not much matter, we must also be indulgent towards our actions. Too much has been asked of us by our Creator, Who has not provided us with adequate means to carry out His will. 'It is to be wished that there were more proportion between the commandment and our power to obey. It seemeth unjust to set up for us a goal that we cannot reach. . . . How can we strive to be good according to God's law

[1] *Essais*, iii. 1 : 'De l'Utile et de l'Honnête.'
[2] *Ibid.*

when we are not able to be good according to our own? Human wisdom hath never yet compassed the duties it prescribed to itself; and even had it done so, it would then prescribe fresh duties beyond, to which it would aspire. So hostile to consistency is our nature! Is it, after all, so unrighteous of man not to achieve what is impossible?'[1]

The best we can do is to follow the best that is in ourselves.

'People, more especially such as we are, who live a private life only known to ourselves, should have an abiding standard written within, by the which we should test all our actions. And according thereunto, we should at one moment fondle, and at another chasten ourselves. I have my own laws and my own law-courts, the which will judge of me; and I address myself to them rather than elsewhere. I may restrain my deeds according to other people, but I only understand them according to myself.'[2]

He understood them so well that he found that he had small use for repentance—of the ordinary kind—nor, considering our moral helplessness, did he think repentance desir-

[1] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 2: 'Du Repentir.'

able. 'Forgive,' he wrote, 'my repeating what I have so often said—that I seldom repent, and that my conscience is satisfied with itself, not as with the conscience either of an angel, or of a horse, but as with the conscience of a human man.'[1]

'My actions are ruled by and suited to what I am and to my actual condition. I can do no better—and repentance has really no concern with such matters as lie outside our moral strength.'[2] It is words such as these which filled Pascal, Montaigne's great antagonist, with bitter enmity. Montaigne hated conviction of sin as a poisonous disturber of the peace, invented by presumptuous priests and purists. To Pascal it was the breath of life—a terrible life and a fiery breath blowing from the wilderness, but sent by God as the only scourge strong enough to drive us to Him. Without the conviction of sin, Pascal could not have believed in virtue. To Montaigne it made virtue impossible. To Pascal natural virtue was as bad as sin, while Montaigne thought it the only virtue worth having. And yet this does not mean that Montaigne altogether discarded repentance—he reserved it. The offences he

[1] *Essais*, iii. 2: 'Du Repentir.' [2] *Ibid.*

thought worthy of it are few; but when he repented, it must be whole repentance; no mere word fossilised by frequent use, no mere plumage of remorse, but a repentance like that of the Psalmist.

'I know no superficial, moderate repentance —no mere formality. It must touch me at every point before I give it the name. Then let it burn into my marrow; let my sufferings pierce me as deep and as universally as the eye of God.'[1]

In the case of Montaigne, the sense of folly took the place of the sense of sin—as it does for so many ironical thinkers. Sins of belief did not exist for him, only the follies of believers. 'After all,' he says, 'it is setting a high value upon our conjectures to have a man roasted alive for them.'[2] 'If truth, like falsehood, had only one countenance, we should stand on clearer ground. For we should take the opposite of what the liar says as a certainty. But the reverse side of truth has a hundred thousand faces and a boundless field.'[3]

No worse stab than this denial of the fixity of falsehood and of truth was given by Montaigne to the creed of his successor.

[1] *Essais*, iii. 2: 'Du Repentir.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 11: 'Des Boiteux.'
[3] *Essais*, i. 9: 'Des Menteurs.'

Pascal, too, had stumbled and groped among the shifting sands of thought—had stumbled, and almost sunk. That was the great gulf between them. Pascal had wandered despairingly where Montaigne had strolled agreeably; and where Montaigne, the Hedonist, watched the horizon disappear into the sea with no more painful sensation than an active and impartial curiosity, Pascal, the sufferer, felt his whole happiness at stake, and knowing that the waves would else devour him, he clung to the one vessel that was, it seemed to him, strong enough to weather the ocean—the vessel of mystery and authority, the vessel of the Church. Montaigne, we shall see, had his place in the same ship, but for other reasons. For as far as his real faith was concerned, his ideas were but those of a Pagan who happened to be born a Catholic. And this applies even to his finer utterances—to those, for instance, upon death, a subject which nearly always lifted him to a higher plane. 'The presentment of death is the presentment of liberty; whoso hath learned to die hath unlearned servitude.'[1] 'For that God giveth us the leisure to order our flitting, let us prepare for the same. Let us roll up our baggage and

[1] *Essais*, i. 20: 'Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir.'

take leave of the company in good time. . . . We must loosen strong obligations and henceforth we may love here and love there, but we must only wed ourselves.'[1] 'Earth, air, fire and water—all the component parts of this my edifice—are no more the instruments of life than they are of death. Why dost thou fear thy last day? . . . The last step doth not make weariness, it only declareth it. All days travel towards death: the last arriveth.'[2] 'It is an action full of reason and of piety to take example from the very humanity of Jesus Christ. Now he ended his life at three-and-thirty years old. The greatest man—simply man—Alexander, also died at this age.'[3]

Montaigne's human dignity was not disturbed by any thought of what dreams might come. To discuss them was to him but one more exercise of human presumption. And in any form of personal continuity he disbelieved.

'If the pleasures,' he says, 'that you promise us in another life are such as those that I have felt here below, then they have nothing in common with infinity. Sup-

[1] *Essais*, i. 39: 'De la Solitude.'
[2] *Essais*, i. 20: 'Que philosopher c'est appendre à mourir.'
[3] *Ibid.*

posing all my five natural senses were overpowered by enjoyment, and this my soul were possessed by all contentments it could hope for and desire, yet we know what even its utmost cometh to. It is as nothing. For in all this there may be something of me, but there is nothing divine. . . . All mortal satisfaction is mortal. As for the recognition of parents, children, friends, if it could touch or charm us in the other world—if we still set any store by such a pleasure—we should still be lying among the flesh-pots of things finité. We cannot worthily conceive the greatness of these high and God-like promises if we conceive them at all; to imagine them adequately, we must imagine them unimaginable, unspeakable, incomprehensible — perfectly diferent from those of our miserable experience . . . and if to make us fit for them, our being must be changed and re-moulded, as thou thinkest, O Plato, by thy purifications, then the change would be so vast and universal that, according to the teaching of physics, it would no longer be ourselves.'[1]

So spoke Montaigne, and yet entertained no doubt that he was a good Catholic. He had, as we said, his place in the same ship as Pascal,

[1] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

for on all this Pyrrhonism—this, we were going to say, heterodoxy, but we should rather say no-doxy—Montaigne confidently grafted orthodoxy. Since truth and falsehood are not fixed, fix them: let men believe like their forefathers. Since reason has failed, substitute authority.

'Our faith is not our acquisition. . . . It is neither through our intellect nor our understanding that we have received our religion; it is through authority and by an external command. The weakness of our judgment helpeth us here better than its strength, and blindness more than clear vision. . . . It is not surprising that our natural and earthly powers cannot conceive a knowledge supernatural and celestial. Let us bring thereunto nothing of ourselves save obedience and submission.'[1]

'We see every day that when human nature swerveth, however slightly, from the main road, and wandereth from the beaten track traced out by the Church, in an instant it misseth its turnings and loseth its way, it groweth confused and entangleth itself, drifting hither and thither, aimless, unbridled, in this vast sea of tossing waves, the sea of opinion. As soon as it departeth from

1 *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

the great high road, it goeth on, dwindling and scattering itself on many different paths.'[1]

'"What shall I choose?" "What you like, provided that you do choose." That is a foolish answer, yet it seemeth that it is the answer of all dogma—the which alloweth us in no wise to be ignorant about our ignorance.'[2] 'Thus hath Divine Majesty in some fashion allowed Himself for our sakes to be circumscribed by bodily limitations: His supernatural sacraments are but signs of our earthly condition; adoration of Him expresseth itself by ritual, by words made tangible to sense. For it is man who prayeth and believeth.'[3]

'Far it is from honouring Him Who made us, to honour Him whom we have made.'[4] 'Those things which come down to us from heaven they alone have the right and authority to persuade us, alone the mark of Truth: the which, also, we behold not with our eyes, neither receive it by any means of ours. This great and holy image could not abide in so mean a dwelling-place, if God had not prepared it for this purpose.'[5] 'To

[1] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*

make the handful greater than the hand . . . to desire to stride farther than the stretch of our legs alloweth — this is impossible and monstrous. And so is it to imagine that man should climb above himself and above humanity; for he can only see with his eyes and seize as much as his grasp permitteth. He will only rise if God, by grace alone, lendeth him a hand; he will only rise by renouncing his own means and letting himself be uplifted by the means of heaven, and nought but heaven. It is for our Christian faith, not for the virtue of the Stoic, to lay claim to this divine, this miraculous transformation.'[1]

And yet side by side with this confession of Montaigne's strange belief, we find, asserted with equal force, more passages than one like the following: 'I love the virtue which is not made by laws and religions, but only perfected and authorised thereby, the virtue which feeleth that it hath within it wherewithal to sustain itself without aid; the virtue born in us of its own roots, by the seed of universal reason—a seed which is embedded in every man who hath not become unnatural.'[2]

At first the one quotation seems to contra-

[1] *Essais*, ii. 12: 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond.'

[2] *Essais*, iii. 12: 'De la Physionomie.'

dict the other, but if we penetrate the meaning of either, we shall see that this is not so. Our goodness is to be no exotic power born of mysticism, but a solid force regulated by the actual strength of our muscle. Faith is to be its adjunct, not its source, for faith is to deal with matters of belief and not of action. In matters of belief we can effect nothing except by the grace of God, but in matters of action we have that within us 'which sustaineth itself.'

The doctrine of original sin was not for Montaigne. His orthodoxy was not the fruit of any spiritual need. Like Pascal, he accepted the Church on the ground of all or nothing. The futility of intellect, the arrogance of man and of his reason, were tenets common to both. But they arrived at the same destination by opposite roads: Montaigne through the mind that he professed to scorn, Pascal through the moral sense. This, unconsciously to Pascal, was perhaps the cause of their worst difference. For there is no such enmity as that which comes of reaching the same end by different means. Any open divergence of belief is more easily forgiven. Sainte-Beuve has written once and for all upon the direct conflict between the two adverse creeds—that of

Montaigne's naturalism and that of Pascal's fervent asceticism. It would be presumptuous to re-discuss what has been already perfectly said. But there is a still stronger hostility between them. Not that between the abstract and logical theologian, and the concrete and logic-hating discourser, but a still more signal opposition, an irreconcilable division : that between the strenuous sufferer and the dilettante ; between the man who has laboured for his patrimony and the man who disowns his father while he inherits his father's fortune.

If it be true that the faith of either man discards reason, it is yet truer that the word faith has a different meaning for each : that to one it is a refuge from doubt ; to the other a screen for scepticism—not only to the world but to himself; to the one a haven from life, to the other a convenient shelf on which to lay mystery and keep it from disturbing existence.

'Man is so great,' says Pascal, 'that his greatness appears even in the fact that he knows he is miserable. A tree does not know it is miserable. True is it that to know oneself miserable is misery, but it is also greatness. In this fashion all man's miseries prove his greatness. They are

miseries of the *Grand Seigneur*, the miseries of a king dethroned.'

'As for me,' says Montaigne, 'I love life and I cultivate it as I find it—just as it hath pleased God to let it be. I gladly and gratefully accept what Nature hath done for me; I am pleased—I congratulate myself.'[1] Suffering is your brevet of divinity—take it as your one chance of salvation, says Pascal. Flee from all pain, it is unnatural not to do so, says Montaigne—behave well, be cheerful, and keep your sanity, it is as much as you can manage. Such, rightly speaking, are the summaries of these two men's creeds. A world lies between them.

And yet no comparison suffices to epitomise Montaigne. Concrete though he be, he can elude us. And every now and then he still baffles us by the glimpses he gives us of that other higher self, of that strain which may have come from his blood, or from elsewhere —who shall tell? Whatever the cause, it remains a fact that the man who cultivated self-supporting virtue was the same man who said—and bade others say—the Lord's Prayer often in the day; who believed in prayer—prayer, he says, before offering which, evil

[1] *Essais*, iii. 13: 'De l'Expérience.'

passions must be banished from the breast. Nor dare we be so irreverent as to pray for all things, or be guilty of 'the error which maketh us resort to God in each one of our designs and undertakings, and call on Him for every sort of need, whenever our weakness wanteth help, without considering whether the occasion be just or unjust.'[1] But the prayer taught by Christ sufficed entirely for his needs.

'I know not,' he says, 'if I deceive myself, but sith that by . . . divine goodness a certain way of prayer has been prescribed to us, dictated word for word by the mouth of God, it hath ever seemed to me that we ought to make the use thereof more ordinary than it is. . . . At sitting down to table and at leaving it, when we rise and when we sleep, and before the performance of those private actions for the which it is customary to put up prayers, I desire that Christians should use the Paternoster, if not alone by itself, at least always. . . . That prayer should have this privilege—that it should constantly be upon the lips of the people; for sure it is that it saith all that is needful, and that it fitteth every occasion. It is the one prayer that I always

[1] *Essais*, i. 56: 'Des Prières.'

pray, and I reiterate it rather than make a change.'[1]

Montaigne is as sincere when he says this as he is in all his other utterances. No thinker has ever been sincerer, or has woven thought of such complex, many-coloured threads. It would be a paradoxical task to go through all the parts that he played: he, Michel de Montaigne, the Stoic and the Hedonist; the orthodox heretic, and the Pagan haunted by Christian prayer; the enemy of the preacher and the ascetic, who thought he knew better than his neighbour; the over-civilised believer in the savage 'so simple that he understandeth not one word of the religion he so carefully observeth';[2] the intellect-hater, who lived upon the intellect; the satirist of presumption, who said 'the most of men's vocations are farcical'; the artist, who knew the secret that 'all experience must be passed through the alembic'; the moralist, who did his best to canonise selfishness and raise it to the rank of self-possession; the opportunist, who proclaimed that 'there are legitimate vices'; the philosopher, who taught mental symmetry, and indulgence, and a large human dignity. All this Montaigne was and much more, and perhaps

[1] *Essais*, i. 56: 'Des Prières.' [2] *Ibid.*

ont eu pluſieurs rares reſſemblances de fortune. Mais la beauté, & la gloire de la mort de cettuy-cy, à la veuë de Paris, & de ſon Roy, pour ſeruice, contre ſes plus proches, à la teſte d'vne armée victorieuſe par ſa conduitte, & d'vn coup de main, en ſi extreme vieilleſſe, me ſemble meriter qu'on la loge entre les remercables euenemẽs de mon temps. Les autres vertus ont eu peu, ou point de miſe en ce temps: mais la vaillance, elle eſt deuenue populaire par noz guerres ciuiles: & en cette partie, il ſe trouue parmy nous, des ames fermes, iuſques à la perfection: & en grand nõbre, ſi que le triage en eſt impoſſible à faire. Voyla tout ce que i'ay connu, iuſques à cette heure, d'extraordinaire grandeur & non commune.

## *Du démentir.* CHAP. XVIII.

VOIRE mais on me dira, que ce deſſein de ſe ſeruir de ſoy-meſmes pour ſubiect à eſcrire, ſeroit excuſable à des hommes rares & fameux, qui par leur reputation auroyent dõné quelque deſir de leur cognoiſſance. Il eſt certain; ie l'aduoüe; & ſçay bien que pour voir vn homme de la commune façon, à peine qu'vn artiſan leue les yeux de ſa beſongne: là où pour voir vn perſonnage grand & ſignalé, arriuer en vne ville, les ouuroirs & les boutiques s'abandonnent. Il méſſiet à tout autre de ſe faire cognoiſtre, qu'a celuy qui à dequoy ſe faire imiter; & duquel la vie & les opinions peuuẽt ſeruir d'exemple & de patron. Cæſar & Xenophõ ont eu dequoy fonder & fermir leur narration, en la grandeur de leurs geſtes, cõme en vne baze maſſiue & ſolide. Ainſi ſont à ſouhaiter les papiers iournaux du grand Alexandre; les commentaires qu'Auguſte, Sylla, Brutus, & autres auoyent laiſſé de leurs geſtes. De telles gens, on ayme & eſtudie les figures, en cuyure meſmes & en pierre. Cette remõſtrance eſt tres-vraie, mais elle ne me touche que bien peu.

*Non*

PAGE FROM MONTAIGNE'S ESSAYS IN THE ORIGINAL EDITION OF 1588 AT BORDEAUX, SHOWING HIS ANNOTATION TO CHAP. XVII, BOOK II, "DE LA PRESOMPTION," AND THE CROSS BELOW AT THE PLACE WHERE IN THE EDITION OF 1595 THE PRAISE OF MLLE. DE GOURNAY WAS INSERTED.

the greatest feat that he achieved was to reconcile these conflicting strands, crossing and recrossing one another; to make them into an active force possessing a unity—not a unity of expression, but of life.

What is it in the end that Montaigne stands for? No man who has read his diatribes against human conceit and inability would presume to try and fully answer such a question. His attitude of mind cannot be compressed into any final form of words: his scepticism and his irony make the light and atmosphere which bathed his every thought. But certain of those thoughts stand out positively and focus the rest. And to give these central truths in his own words is the only way to write Montaigne's epitaph.

'We are never at home—we are always out and abroad.'[1]

'The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to oneself.'[2]

'The friendship that each man oweth to himself . . . a beneficent, well-controlled friendship, profitable and pleasant—he who comprehendeth and practiseth the duties thereof . . . hath reached the summit of human wisdom

[1] *Essais*, i. 3: 'Nos affections nous emportent au delà de nous.'
[2] *Essais*, i. 39: 'De la Solitude.'

and happiness. . . . He who in nowise liveth for others hardly knoweth how to live for himself. . . . All the same, whoso abandoneth of his own accord a gay and wealthy life in order to serve others, maketh, to my mind, an evil and unnatural decision.'[1]

'Save for thee, O man, . . . every creature studieth itself first, and hath, according to its needs, due limits to its work and its desires. There is not a single one so empty and so poverty-stricken as thou, and yet thou understandest the universe. Thou art the investigator without information; the judge without power of judging—and, when all is said, thou art the buffoon of the farce.'[2]

'We do not live, we only exist, if we hold ourselves bound and driven by necessity to follow one course alone. The finest spirits are those that show the largest choice, the greatest suppleness.'[3]

'Those who abandon the common offices of life, and renounce the infinite number of thorny rules—the laws which bear so many aspects—which restrict a man of nice honour as a citizen, are, to my mind, a good riddance,

[1] *Essais*, iii. 10: 'De ménager sa volonté.'
[2] *Essais*, iii. 9: 'De la Vanité.'
[3] *Essais*, iii. 3: 'De trois Commerces.'

whatever private discipline they may be enjoining upon themselves. For what they do is, as it were, to die in order to flee from the trouble of living well. They may have another kind of worth; but the worth that comes of grappling with difficulty hath never seemed to me to be theirs. Nor when we are beset, is there aught, so I believe, to be done, transcending this: that we should stand holding ourselves upright amid the thronging floods of the world.'[1]

This is his answer to all exceptional people who act exceptionally: to martyrs more especially, to Puritans, most heroes, and to all ascetics. It is his great plea for common life and for the obvious — his indictment of intellectual arrogance.

Had Montaigne been able to believe that the faults that he attacks in these adages were lessened in the world by his blows, he would have died the happier. But he did not believe it. Presumption, insincerity, one-sidedness, the lack of self-rule and self-respect, these were the foes—assuredly no windmills —of this most unquixotic of assailers. And presumption, as we know, included for him much of what we hold most precious: the

[1] *Essais*, ii. 33: 'L'Histoire de Spurina.'

hardly-won riches of the mind; the dreams and aspirations of the soul. But he fought modestly, and he fought disinterestedly. He never sought to be the hero of the field; he made for neither loot nor laurels.

'Sir, you have wrestled well and overthrown more than your enemies.' These are the thanks that posterity ought to tender him, and with truth.

Montaigne's wisdom is the heritage he left to the world. Yet wisdom is not the secret of his power, that mysterious power which has stirred men of such different casts of mind for more than three hundred years, which has influenced, indeed, the leading minds of every age. For from the beginning Montaigne was the exception to the rule—he was a successful genius, recognised at once and for always. He has suffered no eclipse, he has always lived in the full sunlight of prosperity. It was as if he had ordered his own career, and, snapping his fingers in the face of destiny, had escaped all the sufferings that genius brings. Shakespeare, Bacon, Henri IV., Pascal, Voltaire, Pope, Rousseau, Montesquieu—these are only a few of the spirits whom he affected: the four last-named Frenchmen very strongly. Some thinkers went beyond him in his own

line. His opponents were no less moulded by his hand. Many disliked him, none remained unmoved by him.

No one could say, as it has been said of Rousseau, that three-quarters of his power lay in his style. Montaigne's style is vital—it is easy, coloured, racy of his soil, colloquial, yet perfect in its dignity. He was the first author in France, perhaps in any country, who dared to talk to his readers from an armchair. But no slipshod gown and slippers for him; he is always well dressed, and spick and span in the spotless linen that he loved. His manners charm us—they make us feel at home and yet always in fine company, they are intimate without being familiar. His is a style which gives us appetite; which greatly adds to our enjoyment. It does not cause it. He had no need of rhythm, and more use for strength than for beauty. There is not about Montaigne's words that final magic which compels our submission, apart from the sense that they convey. His secret lay in something that went deeper than his gift of expression.

It lay in force not in charm, this spell which makes us watch him, whether we will or no—it is often no; which captivates us while we almost hate him; which startles even those

of us who love him ; which holds and haunts us almost painfully. For he who has read Montaigne is, if he be candid, never quite the same man again ; while he thinks that he is only being gossiped with, he has had his outlook changed. The landscape is different. Certain patches that were covered up are laid bare ; the undergrowth is trodden down ; the lights and shadows have shifted. Why should this be ? Can we discover ?

After all, what is Montaigne doing while we watch him, half-aghast and half-enthralled ? He is doing the impossible. Like some tiger-charmer, he is playing with the wild beast, Nature. He has not only tamed her, or accomplished a feat in her den. He is getting on well with her ; he can live with her, face to face. Fascinated, repelled, she looks at him ; and fascinated, repelled, we look at her coerced by Montaigne's will. For this same Nature is no stranger to us ; is she not the wild beast that lurks in each of us—sleeping in some, in most hidden, and dreaded by all ? We know she is there, we have always known it, but by a tacit freemasonry we do not breathe the fact to one another. Like children, we feel that if we do the bogey may leap out on us—and then ? But here

is Montaigne unconcernedly sporting with her, caressing her, treating her as a familiar. How can we not stand amazed? This is a matter of personal import. If Nature is to be treated as no monster, but as a recognised inmate of the house, what about our laws and traditions? What becomes of accepted moralities? If we test them, how many will remain? how much of the fabric will crumble? Small wonder that Montaigne possesses us, that we are dominated by his thought. We are all involved in the issue.

It would be a task of absorbing interest to compare Montaigne's attitude towards Nature with that of his great contemporary, Bacon. To Bacon she was no comrade for daily intercourse: rather he wished to make her his slave, the minister to his intellectual needs, a mine in which to dig for knowledge. But if Montaigne had wanted a living example to prove his thesis—the moral ruin that comes of dependence on the intellect, on the aspirations and ambitions of the mind, he might have pointed to Lord Verulam. 'Here,' he might have said, 'is the man who thought himself different from *les autres*.' Bacon wrote loftily and lived dishonourably; Montaigne lived honourably and wrote what, if it

was not low, was at least below the level of his life.

The close of that life was not the close alone of his existence. With Michel de Montaigne died a century. And with Michel de Montaigne there began a new age which has not ended yet.

For Montaigne, like most great thinkers living in the last years of a great period, was a man of two tenses: he 'looked before and after.' He summed up the expiring Renaissance—its war against priestcraft and monasticism, its splendour of emancipation, its almost hectic love of the classics, its generous assertion of human dignity; and he foreshadowed the far future—its naturalism, its rejection of romance, its fervent scientific curiosity, its familiar ease of demeanour.

The types of both past and future could appeal to Montaigne to justify them. Catherine de' Medici, the epitome of the Renaissance, might have quoted him, chapter and verse, as the author of her moral indifference, her inaction, her scorn of principles, her cult of the doctrine of expediency. But with equal justice—and perhaps with deeper significance—that most modern spirit, Henri IV. could have called himself Montaigne's disciple.

His tolerance, based on human wisdom, not on conviction; his human sympathies which destroyed conventionalities; his dislike of purposeless cruelty; his critical mind, accepting truth as relative; more than all, his ironic humour, which played around his life and affected all he did—his public policy, his private morals—these qualities are redolent of the *Essays*.

Montaigne was even more of a modern than he was a man of the Renaissance. He belongs first and foremost to the future; his relation to it lay deeper than his relation to the past. And it is of the future that we think as we turn the last page of his book. We greet the new day, and we take our leave of the old, with the name of Michel de Montaigne upon our lips.

# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

§ 1. TEXT. Montaigne published the first two books of his *Essais* in 1580: *Les Essais de messire Michel, seigneur de Montaigne, Livres premier et second.* Bourdeaus, par Simon Millanges, 1580, sm. 8vo [Grenville, 2344]. Other editions of these two books appeared, Bordeaux, 1582; Paris, 1587. A so-called 'fifth' edition of *Les Essais*, augmented by a third book and six hundred additions to the first two books, was given to the world by Montaigne after his return from his travels: Paris, Abel' l'Angelier, 1588, 4to. This was the last edition published during the essayist's lifetime. In a sense, therefore, it affords a more authentic text than any other, and we shall refer to it as text A. The 1580 text was reissued by Dezeimeris et Barckhausen at Bordeaux, 2 vols. 8vo, 1874 (with 1582 and 1587 variants). Reinhold Dezeimeris has written several learned works on the text of Montaigne. The 1588 text is reproduced (with most of the 1595 addenda as footnotes) by Mothau and Jouaust in their seven-volume edition of 1886-89.

Before his death in 1592 Montaigne left two copies of the latest edition of the *Essais* (1588), with numerous and diverse annotations. One of these, which forms the basis of the Bordeaux text, and which we may designate text B, was given by the Montaigne family to the convent of Feuillants at Bordeaux, where the essayist was buried. In 1792, when the convent was sacked, this was removed into the municipal library at Bordeaux, and it furnished the material of the not very accurate reprint published by Naigeon at Paris in 1802 (Didot, 4 vols., 8vo). The text is difficult, as the printed pages have been slightly cropped by the binder here and there, while the interpolations are often almost illegible. The municipality have now given

their attention to the matter, and have entrusted the work of re-interpretation to M. Fortunat Strowski, whose superb edition, crowned by the French Academy, and now approaching completion, has formed the basis of the present study (thus, in referring to the Essays in Book I., the numbering [1] of the Bordeaux Edition has been followed), and promises to be that of the received text of the future. That place hitherto has been occupied by

The text furnished by the second copy, with annotations, found in Montaigne's library. The original (now lost) was entrusted by the widow to Montaigne's *fille d'alliance*, Marie de Gournay. She inserted all the interlineations, and, after submitting her work to Pierre de Brach, who supplied yet further additions (probably from the Bordeaux or B text), brought out the fullest version of the *Essais* that had yet seen the light (Paris, folio, 1595). This text may be designated C; the additions are authentic Montaigne marginalia, but they sometimes confuse the text, and it is more than doubtful if the author had the intention of incorporating them as they stand.

With its faults, this text has formed the basis of the best-known and most elaborate editions of the *Essais*: those of J. V. Le Clerc (Paris, Lefèvre, 5 vols., 8vo, 1826-28), Charles Louandre (Paris, Charpentier, 4 vols., 12mo, 1854), and MM. Courbet et Royer (Paris, Lemerre, 4 vols., 8vo, 1872-77). All these derive from text C. The desideratum by Montaigne students at present—and now that M. Strowski's work is accessible it ought soon to be realised—is a careful reissue of text A (1588), with a variorum apparatus embodying the additions and alterations of texts B and C.

The *Journal de Voyage* of Montaigne in 1580-81 was discovered, 1769-70, in an attic of the Château de Montaigne in the form of a Manuscript of 178 folios (lacking the first leaf), by a Perigordian canon named Prunis. This fortunate priest took it to Paris, where it was edited by M. de Querlon in 1774. Its authenticity has been fully confirmed, and its importance has been progressively estimated by all Montaigne scholars (new edition by A. d'Ancona,

[1] No. 40 in Le Clerc is No. 14 in Strowski.

Città di Castello, 1895; English translation by W. G. Waters, 1903; with Introduction, table of proper names, and version of Italian portions of text, by Louis Lautrey, 1906).[1]

§ 2. ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS. The two, both well-known, translations of the Essays are those by John Florio and Charles Cotton, respectively the Italian tutor to James I.'s Queen Consort, and the poet who was the friend of Izaak Walton. *The Essayes written in French by Michael, Lord of Montaigne . . . Done into English by John Florio*, appeared first in 1603, again in 1613, and in 1632. Florio, though by general consent a very flowery usher to his Lord of Montaigne, still holds the field, and is represented to-day by three serviceable editions—Nutt's *Tudor Translation* of 1892; Dent's *Temple Classics*' edition in six small volumes; and the three-volume edition published by Grant Richards, 1908-9, with an 'Introductory Essay' by Thomas Seccombe. Charles Cotton's version, more accurate as a whole, but uneven, and certainly less 'resolute' than Florio's, was first published in 1685 (3rd ed., 1711: ed. W. Hazlitt the second, with Bibliog., 1842 and 1845; revised by W. C. Hazlitt, with Letters and Travels added, in a very useful composite volume, with a Life built up like a mosaic from the Essays, 1889, and, 4 vols., 1902).

§ 3. MONOGRAPHS. Studies of Montaigne have done much to elucidate difficult points, and, with the exception of Pascal's criticisms and Emerson's, those of most value have appeared in France and England within the last forty years. Those most in evidence are here enumerated in chronological order, commencing with J. B. Biot's essay, *Montaigne*, of 1812. Emerson's fine estimate in *Representative Men*, 1850, has hardly been surpassed. Alphonse Grün's *Vie Publique de Montaigne*, 1855, contains valuable letters. Bayle St. John's *Montaigne the Essayist* of 1858 is one of the first attempts to familiarise Montaigne easily to English readers. It was

[1] See *Times*, 8th January 1904, and Chambrun de Rosemont's *Recits et Impressions de Voyage au 16me siècle*.

followed in 1878 by W. Lucas Collins's brightly written *Montaigne* (in Foreign Classics for English Readers). But a majority of the best equipped books are recent, such as Th. Malvezin's *M. de Montaigne, Son Origine et sa famille*, 1875 and 1889; Petit de Julleville's masterly *Extraits* (numerous editions), and study in *Hist. Litteraire*; F. Hémon's *Montaigne* (1892); Faguet's careful appreciation in his *Seizième Siecle* of 1894; Pater's elaborate tesselation in *Gaston Latour*, 1896; Lanusse's critical essay in the *Classiques Populaires*, 1895; Miss Lowndes's scholarly *Biographical Study* of 1898; Stapfer's lucid and illuminating 'Montaigne' in *Les Grands Écrivains*, 1895, following his book on Montaigne's Family and Friends, which was surpassed in a measure by Paul Bonnefon's *Montaigne et ses Amis* of 1898, an expansion of this same writer's delightful *Montaigne l'homme et l'œuvre* of 1893. Edme Champion's helpful and suggestive *Introduction aux Essais* (following Vernier) appeared in 1900, and the new century has started well with the admirable monograph by Professor Dowden (1905, Lippincott's French Men of Letters), which covers the field, and the more technical studies of Professor Lanson and Fortunat Strowski. We can merely refer here to the essays by Sainte-Beuve, Langlais, Ruel, Bimbenet, Jeudy, Leveaux, Gauthiez, Compayré (there is quite a small literature on Montaigne's education), Betz, Joseph Neyrac, Dean Church, Sir J. F. Stephen, Saintsbury, Norton, Whibley, Seccombe, and the eloquent and discriminating study by Warwick Bond (1906).

§ 4. Special Points. On special points, and especially for hitherto unpublished or unfamiliar Letters, the writer must refer expressly to the following works:—A. Jubinal, *Lettre inédite de M.*, 1850; Bigorie de Laschamps, *Michel de Montaigne*, Paris and Rennes, 1855; *Lettres de Marguerite de Valois*; *Pièces du Procès de Libri* (Pamphlets, Bibl. de France, Lettres de Jubinal, P. Lacroix, Naudet, etc.), 1849 (for Letters to Henry IV. of 1585-90); H. Wendell's (1882), and Voizard's *Étude sur la langue*, Paris, 1885 (for linguistic points); Champollion-Figeac, *Documents Historiques inédits*; Sidney Lee's *French Renais-*

*sance in England*, 1910 (letter about Montaigne's death); Livet's *Précieux et Précieuses*, Paris, 1859, and Mario Schiff's *La fille d'alliance de Montaigne, Marie de Gournay*, Paris, 1911 (for Mlle. de Gournay); The *Recherches* and *Documents Inédits* of Dr. Payen; and the *Collections* (Cartons 926-929, Bibl. Nat.) of J. B. Bastide. For works dealing with Montaigne and Shakespeare it will suffice to refer to the works of P. Chasles, Feis, and J. M. Robertson (*Montaigne and Shakespeare*, 1909). M. Villey, the now well-known blind student of Montaigne, whose researches into the Montaigne sources have excited so much admiration, is preparing an essay on this subject. The derivation of the term Essay from Montaigne in our literature is significant.

§ 5. BIBLIOGRAPHIES. Garnier, in the fourth volume of Louandre's edition, still serves as a basis, though he must be supplemented now by the authorities given in Petit de Julleville, Faguet, and Lanson (in their Literary Histories), and by the materials presented in Gabriel Richou's *Inventaire de la Collection des Ouvrages et Documents sur M. de Montaigne . . . à la Bibl. Nationale*; in Nolhac and Dorez, *Bibl. Litt. de la Renaissance* (1898); in Dowden's excellent select 'Bibliography'; in M. Strowski's *Montaigne* (in *Les Grands Philosophes*); and in W. P. Courtney's invaluable *Register of Bibliography*. Much has been done on the sources of the essayist by J. de Zangroniz, *Montaigne, Amyot and Saliat* (1906); Bonnefon on Montaigne's Library (some seventy-six books in which have survived); and especially by Pierre Villey in his *Livres d'histoire utilisés par Montaigne* (1908), and cognate studies.

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